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#73

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT
editor/publisher

conceived by
JIM SALICRUP
editorial and design consultant

DARREL BOATZ
associate editor

SCOTT McCLOUD
PETER SANDERSON
contributing editors

M KAY McGONNELL
operations manager

D HAMBONE
art & tone director

DON MARKSTEIN
typographer

DOUG WRIGHT
production

TAMMY BROWN
LAUREL FITCH
KURT GOLDZUNG
CAROL KALISH
JEAN MARC LOFFICIER
PEGGY MAY
NADINE MESSNER-LOEBS
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MARTIN W HERZOG
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MONDO PEEPO
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J R MATHER
international marketing director

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cover (detail) by:
WENDY PINI

UP FRONT

The American public, as a whole, has never quite taken the comics medium seriously. For instance, Japanese comics creators are giants among the rich and famous; their top artists and writers reportedly rank up with Japanese industrial moguls whose products are an international household name. Comics creators are household names, too, in Japan.

The French government deemed their major annual comics convention in Angouleme worthy of being heralded with a set of collectors' postage stamps, depicting works of famous French comics artists — along with full television and media coverage of the convention, of course. Net result: 250,000 attendees.

The Italians have a whole range of "raunchy" adult comics material, while on the other end of the scale such scholars as **Umberto Eco** took the Snoopy gang most seriously, and created the highbrow magazine, LINUS. (Italian intellectuals are said to read LINUS on the train for snob value.)

The format of European comics is often far more elaborate than the American, many works being produced in full color on high quality paper with hardcovers. Such items are cherished and saved on the bookshelf alongside WAR AND PEACE and other works of literature.

Yet none of these have proven successful in the United States in quite the same way.

Many European publishers feel there is not enough material being produced there for children. Many Americans feel there is not enough material being produced here for adults.

Meanwhile, the Japanese have a popular comic character chasing people with a turd on a stick.

Maybe comics are not being taken seriously enough.

Or maybe comics are being taken too seriously.

— J.R. Mather
International Marketing Director

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL:
UP FRONT
j.r. jawbones
3

SPOTLIGHT:
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
artist wendy pini *on the set of the tv series, per* peter sanderson
4

WRITER/ARTIST:
WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEBS
the interview that wouldn't die! scott mccloud *returns, this time on the other side of the mike, in what we call "the interview from hell"*
24

RETAILER:
THE ALBUM SHOPS
a far-flung look at comics retailing from a different point of view . . . paris, france!
44

LETTERS:
THE LAST WORD
all about "the interview from hell"
66

"I got a very strong feeling that the show

Beauty and the Beast

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, as any kindergarner will tell you, is a fairy tale love story about a beautiful woman and an ugly beast of a man, and of the troubles they must endure because of their love. It is a basic theme as old as the hills, and which has been rendered into the folk tradition of, probably, every society that has ever existed on the face of the Earth. And in whatever form taken, it is marvelous and endearing and magical and reassuring.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that these same qualities are to be found in the CBS television program named BEAUTY AND THE BEAST. That this show is such a startling, poignant, moving and potent realization of that basic theme, however, is another matter. In some manner which can only be described as a kind of magic, all of the perfect elements came together at just the right time, in just the right place, in just the right way, and something truly unique unto itself emerged.

And now, Wendy Pini, famed co-creator of ELFQUEST along with her husband Richard, has turned her skills toward creating a graphic novel derived from that television show . . .

PETER SANDERSON: *So, how did this project come about?*

WENDY PINI: Well, it's kind of a neat story. This all started in the spring of '88. I was out in California for a month, just doing some work, visiting relatives, and so forth. I was in the Los Angeles area and I called up **George R.R. Martin.** We had spoken previously; I had called him up out of the blue to tell him how much I liked BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, because I was *sure* I had bumped into him at one or two conventions, he looked so familiar when I saw him on a CNN interview. And he knew me, he knew ELFQUEST, and so we had a nice conversation. So, when I was in Los Angeles he said, "Let's have lunch and I'll take you on a tour of the set." I was delighted. While I was on the set, seeing just how beautifully conceived the whole thing was, and how dedicated the actors and the crew were and everything, I got a very strong feeling that the show had a life of its own *beyond* television.

So, I spent about three hours with George, and at the end of that I asked him if he thought that **Ron Koslow** might be open to the idea of a graphic novel based on the show. George wasn't sure but he said, "Hey, go ahead and give it a try." Some months later I sent in a proposal package. It was at the San Diego Con that summer that I found out that First Comics was also in the process of negotiating for BEAUTY AND THE BEAST as either a comic or a graphic novel property. **Olivia DeBerardinis** apparently is quite good friends with **Ron Koslow**, and she had a lot to do with interesting First in the property. So, the

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1989 Republic Pictures Corporation. (Comic ©1989 First Comics), unless otherwise noted.

had a life of its own beyond television."

whole team started to come together at that point, because I let **Rick Obadiah** know that I was very very interested in doing this graphic novel. I visited First Comics and showed them the package that I had sent, and one thing led to another and I struck the deal with First.

Then it was kind of a long, slow process of getting everything in place, in terms of getting approval from **Ron Koslow.** He is extremely protective of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST; that's why you haven't seen too many properties at all that have been licensed off the show.

PETER: *What is Ron Koslow's connection with the show, exactly?*

WENDY: Ron Koslow is to BEAUTY AND THE BEAST what **Gene Roddenberry** is to STAR TREK. He is the executive producer, he is the *creator* of the show. Apparently somebody from on high at CBS asked him to develop BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, taking inspiration from the **Cocteau** film, it's my understanding. **Ron Koslow** wrote the pilot episode, "Once Upon a Time in New York," and things took off from there. He's really, like the heart and soul of the show. Everything goes through him.

PETER: *And George R.R. Martin is the story editor?*

WENDY: George R.R. Martin is a producer or *also* an executive producer, and he is chief story editor and writer for the show.

PETER: *What made you decide not to go after the rights yourself once you heard First was —*

WENDY: Well, at first we didn't know exactly what the situation was going to be, because Father Tree Press had also expressed interest, but so many things were in place already with Olivia and First Comics. It just so happened that things fit together in that way. For *me*, ultimately I think it was a good situation, because it kind of put me down in the trenches. For ten years I have been totally *spoiled! (Laughter.)* You know, having my own company and having my own editor and publisher right here, and just being able to have *total* freedom and not have to wait on anybody's mercies. But through working with First I have had a real education in what it's like to have one's fate in someone *else's* hands, and require approval from them before you even make a move. I feel like it's a really good life experience for me that it turned out this way.

PETER: *Not that you've had any trouble with First?*

"Ron Koslow is extremely protective

WENDY: Quite the contrary. From the beginning everyone has been extremely enthusiastic about this project. The team that's been put together, my editor **Laurel Fitch,** my art director **Alex Wald,** and **Rick Obadiah** and everybody else involved have just been incredibly supportive. They are very very excited about the project, and I think they really started getting excited when all of the final approvals came through. It's kind of difficult to describe the stress of the stop and go. First of all, it took a long time to get approval on a story. I think originally **Ron Koslow** wanted us to just adapt an episode that had already been done, but the people at First were against that; so was I, on the grounds that, you know, the audience has already seen this story and when you have it on TV, why have it in a glorified comic book?

PETER: *Especially when a lot of them have already recorded it on their VCRs.*

WENDY: Oh, I'm sure. *(Laughter.)* But again, this goes back to **Ron Koslow's** protectiveness. He has such a clear and such a strong vision of what he wants for the show that he was concerned, because he really doesn't know from comics, he's not a comics reader. I think when the idea of a graphic novel was proposed, he probably felt, "Oh, God, my show is going to be a comic book? What are they going to *do* to it?" There were some natural and very understandable reservations there.

PETER: *But you can understand that, having been in the opposite position — "Oh, no, my comic books are going to become a TV show or a movie or whatever."*

WENDY: Yeah. That's a very keen insight, Peter, because I think it's *because* I have been on the other side of that, that I was able to tolerate whatever delays came up. I felt that **Ron Koslow** was entitled to be as involved and to have as much say-so as possible, so that the project would be as true to *his* vision as possible. And I think that once we gained his trust . . . First, it took, like, four stories. I submitted three different plots before he finally accepted a fourth plot. The first three plots were more or less based on the formula of the first season, which was kind of violent and cops 'n' robbers and that sort of thing — it was a little bit darker. This was in October when the second season was just starting, and they were going in a softer direction.

So, I spent a couple of days on the set out there, and I had a chance to talk with the cast and crew and with **George R.R. Martin,** and I really got a strong feeling for what it was **Ron Koslow** was looking for. That's when I was able to write PORTRAIT OF LOVE, and that was the story that he accepted. But that took a long long time to push through, and then after that he had to see the script, he had to see full layouts of the artwork; and, actually, real steady work on this

From the sketchbook of Wendy Pini

# of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST."

project didn't begin until sometime in January. It was a *long* wait.

The process of getting all of the approvals was so hard, and yet I understand that — and this relates very much to Richard's and my experience with ELFQUEST. Fantasy is very fragile. It exists in your head, there isn't any other point of refernce outside that. So, **Mr. Koslow** is, like, the main protector of the vision, I think it's only natural that he would want everything that he sees, in terms of licensing, to be true to that vision. And it's awfully hard to *talk* about what that vision is. If you are a fantasy artist or writer, or a combination of both, it's really very difficult to *explain* what it is you're doing, and why you're doing it. And so if someone comes to you and says, "Oh, I want to do a comic book based on your show," and you've got this very delicate, fragile thing that is very difficult to talk about, very difficult to do interviews about, a really *weird* concept that's *very* hard to explain, and that met with a lot of resistance before it actually got on the air, then the reserve about having any kind of adaptation done from it in another medium is entirely understandable.

It's so fragile that it could come apart at any point, and I think the main thing in pushing this project through was to *prove* ourselves, in that the project would not come apart, the vision would not suffer, as a result.

PETER: *So, that's what you did, obviously.*

WENDY: I think so. The final verdict isn't in yet. I am happy with what I've done, I feel satisfied with the work. I know that everyone in Hollywood seems to be satisfied with what's been done. When the book is finally out and people hold it in their hands and see it, the final verdict remains to be seen. But I have a good, positive feeling about it. I think it will do well, and I think that everybody involved will feel the tribute. Those are my hopes, at any rate.

It was a moment of great delight to me when **Ron Koslow** called me and gave me his final blessing on what I had done. He said — I'm not quoting him exactly — but he said something to the effect that I had gotten all of the voices right. In other words, each character that appears in the graphic novel speaks in the recognizable or identifiable way that they speak on the show. I was extremely pleased with that, extremely pleased that *he* was comfortable. The last thing I wanted to do was worry him, what with everything else going on in the hectic

second season. I wanted the graphic novel to be a project that would make him feel positive, not like it was something he had to worry about.

PETER: *Well, tell me more about your visit to the set. What was it like?*

WENDY: Oh, there are so many terrific little stories! I had the *best* time! I was treated so beautifully, it was a very welcoming experience. The first day I came on the set — my guardian angel on the set was **David Schwartz,** who is the set producer, and he basically oversees everything that goes on for the day's

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Wendy Pini
Occupation: Writer/Illustrator/Storyteller
Born: 4 June 1951 — San Francisco.
Credits: ELFQUEST; a couple of stories for Marvel; something for SUPERMAN #400; co-wrote JOURNEY TO SORROWS END with Richard and also supplied the illustrations; pencils for JONNY QUEST #2 for Comico; supplied the text and illustrations for LAW AND CHAOS, an art book inspired by Michael Moorcock's writings; covers for BLOOD OF TEN CHIEFS anthology (ELFQUEST) series from Tor; BEAUTY AND THE BEAST is my most recent project.
Favorite Opera: Anything by Puccini — I have different favorites at different times.
Favorite Book: You've got me. I have a lot of old favorites. Currently reading TRIPMASTER MONKEY by Maxine Hong Kingston.
Favorite Movie: Oh, this is tough. A movie that I watched very recently that I just loved was Osamu Tezuka's PHOENIX in the American translation (SPACE FIREBIRD). Dr. Tezuka died recently, a great light has gone out. He was a great master and a very beautiful and, I suspect, in some ways frustrated artist. THE PHOENIX was a great dream of his. It was the last effort at full Disney style animation in Japan, and it's my understanding that it didn't really go over all that well. I don't think that the Japanese appreciate full animation like that anymore. But PHOENIX, in its edited version, is a very beautiful, very moving story, and it was done quite well. I hope he was pleased.
Goal in Life: To earn more money working less hard. If I could find a way to make money taking the summer off, I would. *(Laughter.)*

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COMICS INTERVIEW

"There is an aura of deep respect among the cast."

shooting — he took me in and he sat me down, because they were filming a scene for "Chamber Music", the first episide of the second season. The room was full of smoke and people, and one of the cameramen came by and looked at me and said, "Are you trying out for the prostitute?" *(Laughter.)* And I said, "No, I'm not an actress." — and he said, "Oh, damn, we need a prostitute." *(Laughter.)*

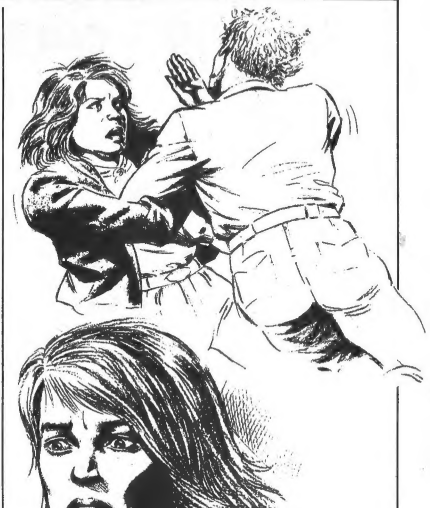
PETER: *My gosh, whatever were you wearing?*

WENDY: I — well, you know, I'm sure actresses don't necessarily totally dress the parts. Actually, I was wearing roses, a rose print jacket which I call my "Beast jacket" because roses are such a strong image in the show. I don't know why he asked me that. But anyway, basically I just kind of stayed in the background and stayed as quiet as possible, and just sketched anything that came into view. It's very very eerie when **Ron Perlman** comes on the set in full makeup, because the makeup is so convincing, and in fact the closer you get to it, the more convincing it is — it's absolutely seamless!

PETER: *Is it eerie for other people, too? Is there, like, a calm, a quiet, that comes over the set? Or was it just because you were new to this?*

WENDY: Well, I would have to say that there is an aura of deep respect among the cast and crew for this product that they are producing. One of the most enjoyable things that happened to me on the set was I had a very long conversation with **Roy Dotrice,** who plays Father in the show. I asked him at one point, "Is it just me, or is this an unusually happy set?" He said, "This is an unusually happy set, there is very much a family feeling here." And that is the truth. My impression was that everyone cares very very deeply about what they are doing. Everyone seemed to share **Ron Koslow**'s vision, particularly **David Schwartz** — it's like from Ron's mouth to David's ear. Just the general feeling about the show is that everyone cares deeply about it, they respect what they're doing, and they take it very seriously.

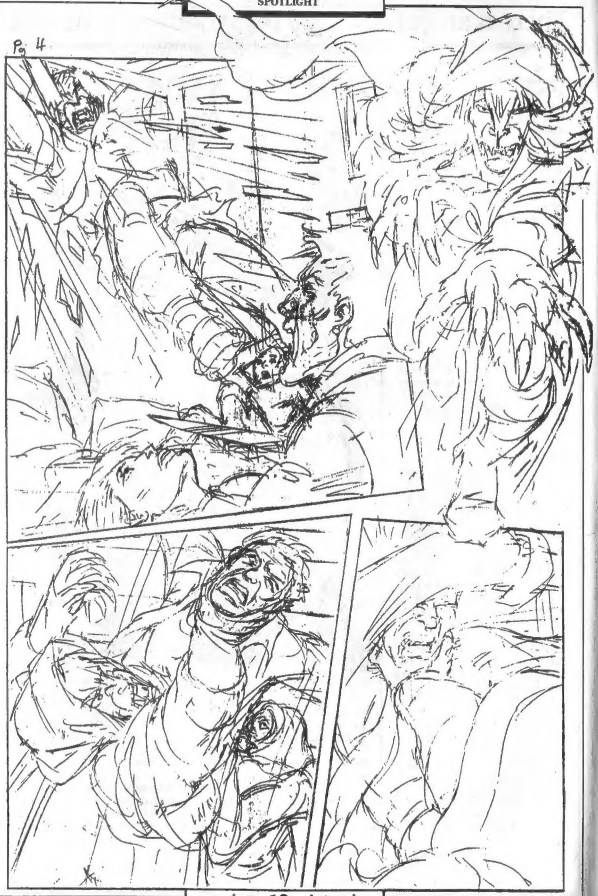
And I had so much fun visiting the set. The set is wonderful, everything is just as you see it on TV. The tunnels are all built, you walk through yards and yards of them, and they are extremely realistic. Oddly enough, they're made of wood, but they certainly don't look it — they look like old, rusty metal, and the pipes are there and everything. And the entire set is full of smoke, constantly, and it's this absolutely vile chemical smoke. I had only been there a couple of hours and my eyes were watering, it was just terrible. I can't imagine how it must feel for **Ron Perlman** to work in all of that makeup *and* have to work in that smoke. But I saw some wonderful things while I was there.



More character studies by Pini.

The first time I saw **Linda Hamilton** they were going to do a balcony scene. She was the last actor that I met, because I guess she was all over the place and very hard to spot. So, she came on the set in this adorable satin pink bathrobe, but I noticed that she had these *enormous* black, fuzzy slippers on. *(Laughter.)* Which I thought was really cute. Of course the camera wasn't picking those up in the balcony scene, but they looked really cute.

The first night I was there, **David Schwartz** took me around. The set is bi-level and it's all in this great big warehouse, and they have some of the tunnels and some of the pillars and outdoor stuff downstairs, and then upstairs they have more tunnels and Cathy's bedroom and the DA's office and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Above: A finished story page (watercolor). Previous page: Wendy's pencil layout of the same page

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"I don't think they were thinking in terms of comic books."

Wendy began her story pages with layouts in pencil — later used/followed with watercolors.

Father's den. Father's den was just out of this world. Everything was designed by **John Mansbridge**, who, as I understand it, did the sets for 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA for Disney. So the *detail*, there is just stuff and stuff and stuff there. **David Schwartz** took me up there, because they weren't filming that particular night, and he lit all of the candles on the set of Father's den, sat me down on a piano bench, and I just sat there sketching for two hours and barely made a dent, because there's so much detail to capture. But it was eerie and wonderful, because I was the only person up there at the time, and everything else was quite dark and the tunnels were all around me. I truly felt that I was down in the tunnels, the atmosphere is just amazing.

PETER: *Was that frightening?*

WENDY: Not in the least, I felt very much at home. And every once in awhile someone would come up and chat with me and see if everything was all right. The thing that amazed me the most was the way that I was accepted. I was definitely not an intruder in the tunnels. *(Laughter.)* You know, people would come up to me and grab my arm and say, "Come over here, you've got to sketch this!" They are all extremely proud of what they've done.

PETER: *And nobody, obviously, was condescending to the idea of a comic book being done. Were they excited about this comic-book artist being on the set who was going to do something with their show?*

WENDY: Absolutely. They were excited and flattered, and I don't think they were thinking in terms of comic books. I don't think they really knew what a graphic novel was. Some of the people among the crew knew what ELFQUEST was, and they were pretty excited, and it was kind of nice to have that point of reference with them. But most of the people were new to the idea of a graphic novel, and so they were asking a lot of questions like, "What is this, some kind of illustrated book with text?" I did a lot of explaining about what the format was like and so forth, and of course passed out copies of ELFQUEST BOOK 1.

As a matter of fact there is a copy of ELFQUEST BOOK 1 somewhere in Father's den now. **Owen Marsh** is one of the head cameramen, and he and I were talking in the DA's office set as I was sketching, and I said, "Gosh, there's just so much incredible stuff in Father's den, it looks like very expensive antiques from

"My rule of thumb is, when in doubt,

all different eras, and it's such an interesting hodgepodge." And he said, "Oh, yeah. Whenever one of us finds some neat little article or Chatchka, we bring it in and stick it on the set." So I said, "Oh, books too?" And he said, "Yeah, any interesting old book, we just bring it and stick it in." So I said, "Would you put a copy of ELFQUEST in there?" *(Laughter.)* And he said, "Sure." So, he took a copy and sprayed it with hair spray to age it down, and it's somewhere stuck behind a candle.

PETER: *What is the single strangest thing that happened to you on the set?*

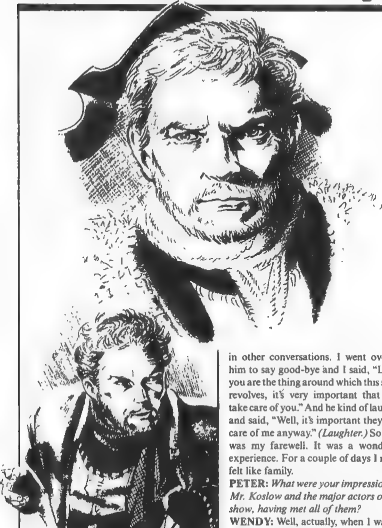
WENDY: Well — *(Laughter.)* Apart from being asked if I was trying out for the prostitute? *(Laughter.)* Well, I wouldn't apply the word "strange" to it, but most of the interesting things that happened had to do with **Roy Dotrice.** He was in the process of telling me a story about how when he was a boy he decided to raise hamsters in his basement, and meanwhile he was trying to get his robe on - he had a ceremonial robe of some kind, and it was all kinds of patchwork and quilting, and it was difficult to find the sleeves or know which was the top and which was the bottom of it. He was telling me how the hamsters in his basement got out of hand and before he knew it he had thousands and thousands of these little things in his basement, and so he had to get rid of them rather quickly. *(Laughter.)* Marvelous Father is telling me about these hamsters down in his basement, and I'm trying to help him on with his robe, we're trying to find the sleeves and so forth — that was a great deal of fun. I took that away as a very fond memory.

PETER: *What was the single most delightful thing that happened?*

WENDY: That has to be when I met **Linda Hamilton** — she called me! She said, "Oh, I've heard all about you but I haven't had a chance to meet you yet." So I came over, and I was agog. You know, she's a tiny, delicate, elfin — if I can use that adjective — woman, and just extremely warm. So, I told her how much I admired her work, and I showed her some of the sketches that I had done during the day, and we discussed how close my likeness of her was and so forth. I gave her a Xerox of one of my sketches of her and said, "Would you be so kind as to autograph this for me?" She said, "Wait a minute, let me go get a pen." So she left, and I was talking to **Margaret Beserra,** and all of a sudden there were these two little arms around me from behind and my autograph was there before me — Linda was hugging me

Character studies, like the ones above, were necessary to achieve what Wendy terms "transcendent likenesses."

stick a candle on it or put fringe on it."



from behind! So I turned around and I hugged her, and I said, "Look, I'm not a man but *I'm* in love with Beauty! I think you're just exquisite!" And she seemed to enjoy that very much. So I gave her a big hug and she went off to film a scene. I would say that was the most delightful, because she really is something special.

Well, so is **Ron Perlman**. There's no choice between the two of them, they are an incredible team. The show would not work without the two of them together — it could never be an all Catherine show or an all Vincent show. And he was exhausted — most of the time when I saw him he was either resting or engaged in other conversations. I went over to him to say good-bye and I said, "Look, you are the thing around which this show revolves, it's very important that they take care of you." And he kind of laughed and said, "Well, it's important they take care of me anyway." *(Laughter.)* So, that was my farewell. It was a wonderful experience. For a couple of days I really felt like family.

PETER: *What were your impressions of Mr. Koslow and the major actors on the show, having met all of them?*

WENDY: Well, actually, when I was on the set I didn't get a chance to talk to **Ron Koslow** directly. He was really really busy. The only time I saw him, he popped in and out on the set during the filming of a scene, and he was surrounded by about ten people. They were in the process of trying to cast a show that they were *already filming*, and my impression was that things were a little bit tense at that point. I knew he was aware of me, because I was sitting there sketching, but we really didn't speak at that point. I've only really spoken to him on the phone. He's a very soft-spoken man — as a matter of fact he has a voice as nice as Vincent's. He sounds like a very imaginative person, someone who likes to use words beautifully, and I can't wait to meet him in person.

George R.R. Martin is a very interesting guy. He's funny. He's got a very *wry* sense of humor, very droll. And he's extremely sharp. He's been very helpful to me so far. When things were beginning to look a little bit bleak, in terms of whether or not **Ron Koslow** was going to accept the story that I had submitted, George was the one who kind of set me on the right track as to what **Koslow** was looking for.

It's hard to talk about **Ron Perlman** because you're really talking about two people. He *literally* seems to be channeling Vincent. *(Laughter.)* Vincent is just such a powerful entity on his own. I have never met **Ron Perlman** out of the makeup, I've only met him in full makeup. It's startling. It unsettles you because Vincent is extremely real. The makeup is just so superior. To have Vincent walk up to you, or to hear him bitching loudly about the Mets, or to see him eating Chinese food, it kind of puts a little sand in your mental gears. *(Laughter.)*

My impression of **Ron Perlman** is that he is a very regular guy, that this has not gone to his head at all, that he works under tremendous stress and he gives 110% of himself, and that he's kind of reserved. In that manner he is a little bit like Vincent. I'm sure he didn't quite know what to make of *me*, because every once in a while I would bump into him or he would see me sketching, and at one point he asked me, "What exactly is this for?" I tried to explain it to him as best I could. So, I gave him a sketch of himself and he gave me an autographed picture of himself, and that was very nice. But I don't really think he'll know exactly what this is all about until he actually sees the book.

Linda Hamilton is absolutely wonderful. She has got this explosive laugh, and she's very very funny and warm and natural. The funniest incident that happened with her was about Vincent's cape. It was my second day on the set, and I was actually just about to leave because it was quite late — they all work up until midnight and beyond, they literally *are* tunnel people, they don't see the sun. *(Laughter.)* So, one of the technicians got Vincent's cape for me — Ron wasn't wearing it at that point — and put it on a coat hanger and hung it up on a piece of the scenery so that I could sketch it. One of the difficulties that I've had in this book is trying to find a way to be truthful to the costume design, and yet at the same time sort of whittle down some of the detail, because there is just fringe and stitching and patches and so forth *everywhere*. My general rule of thumb for drawing BEAUTY AND THE BEAST is "when in doubt, stick a candle on it or put fringe on it." *(Laughter.)*

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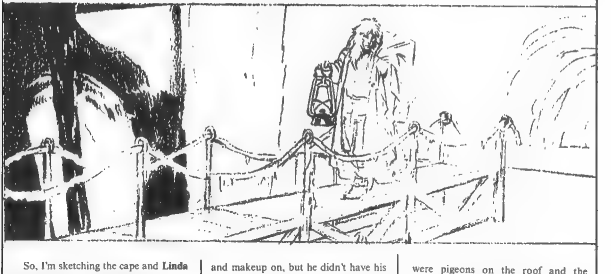
"What I heard Ron Perlman talk about mostly was the Mets."



So, I'm sketching the cape and **Linda Hamilton** and **Margaret Beserra** are sitting together nearby, and I come to a part of the cape that I don't quite understand, because it looks like a long, thin lump of leather with fringe attached to it. I held it up and said, "What's *this*?" And Linda and Margaret looked at each other and started cracking up, and Margaret goes, "Oh, that's the 'Vincent sausage,' she plays with it all the time!" *(Laughter.)* So, there was a little bit of ribaldry there.

PETER: *Well, it's nice to know they don't take themselves too seriously.*

WENDY: No, they don't. There's a wonderful balance of humor. As I said, the thing I heard **Ron Perlman** talk about mostly was the Mets, because apparently it was the night after the game with the Dodgers and the Dodgers had won, and he was rather vociferous about that.

PETER: *So, I take it he only channels Vincent when he's actually playing the part, doesn't do this all of the time when in makeup?*

WENDY: He does not stay in character the whole time; I don't see how he would be able to stand it. I would think that that would be just too stressful, to be in that character all of the time.

PETER: *But one does read about actors who try to stay in character as long as they can when in costume.*

WENDY: Yes. Well, there appeared to me to be always an element of Vincent's reserve and shyness, but I don't know whether that simply is a part of **Ron Perlman's** character or what. The first time I met him, in the spring of '88, the first time I visited the set — that was not the same set that they're on now — it was kind of neat because he had his full mask and makeup on, but he didn't have his costume on, he was wearing khaki pants and white sneakers. I just happened to turn around and here was Vincent coming toward me in these khaki pants and sneakers, and right away I got a dose of his sense of humor. He was very mischievous and quite friendly.

At one point while we were talking, we heard these gunshots go off, and there was a guy up in the rafters shooting blanks through the ceiling because there were pigeons on the roof and the microphone was picking up their cooing. So Ron, wearing the Vincent makeup, looks up and goes, *(Goofy voice)* "Is that Tire in the hole!?!" *(Laughter.)* There are these wonderful moments of humor all of the time.

PETER: *And Mr. Dotrice?*

WENDY: Oh, he is an absolutely delightful person. He is a cross between a very cultured English gentleman and a bit of a rake. *(Laughter.)* He's a little bit ribald. But of course we had something in common right away, because both he and I have had extensive hip surgery. The first part of our conversation was mainly in swapping doctor stories. Just seeing him scoot around, vital and vibrant as he is, he is just wonderful fun to watch. And he is just full of stories. I get the impression that if he gets on a roll he can go for six hours straight. And he was very generous with his time, and particularly helpful to me in consolidating my ideas about PORTRAIT OF LOVE. As a matter of fact he himself had just finished contributing to the teleplay for an episode called "Ashes, Ashes," so he was able to give me a lot of insight on just exactly what it was they were looking for, in terms of tone and content and, again, the voices of the characters. So that was extremely helpful. And, oh, he was so funny, just full of all kinds of gossip and everything.

PETER: *Gossip?*

WENDY: Oh, *yes*, lots of interesting gossip — and I'm not going to give you any! *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Well, I didn't expect you to, but it's another sign of how well you were welcomed to the set.*

WENDY: I felt very much at home, I truly did. I don't know why it happened.

"There is a very strong sense of place in the novel."

Again, **David Schwartz,** I would have to describe him as my guardian angel. Whenever I was at a little bit of a loss, of where to go or what to sketch next, he would show up and either introduce me to someone or say, "Hey, Cathy's set is empty now, do you want to come and sketch her bedroom?" And you're going to see the result of that in the graphic novel, in the sense that there is a very very strong sense of place in the graphic novel, a strong atmosphere, a feeling that the objects that are being drawn and represented all have a place and purpose. Again, as I said, I had to whittle down a lot of detail, because it's very difficult to represent all of that detail panel after panel. But all in all to people who are really devoted to the show and who know the sets very well, they're going to look at it and say, "Yeah, that's the way I know it." They're going to recognize a lot.

PETER: *Which I expect is important to the audience of the show.*

WENDY: Yes, because I think that part of the romance of the show, part of the *character* of the show, is in the wonderful attention to detail that has been paid to the set — particularly down in the tunnels. It would not have the same romance and atmosphere if there wasn't this layer upon layer of detail, whether it's in the costuming or in the environment. But that is not to disparage the above ground sets. Cathy's apartment, the DA's office, everything is very very impressive in its detail. Cathy even has diplomas and newspaper articles pinned to a bulletin board, which is very real-

"I admire Walt Simonson's adaptation of ALIEN."

ALIEN: THE ILLUSTRATED STORY ©1979 Twinkl/In Century-Fox Film Corp. All rights reserved.

ALIEN: THE ILLUSTRATED STORY, art by Walter Simonson (adaptation: Archie Goodwin), 1979

istic and adds to the realism of her world, as opposed to the fantasy of Vincent's world.

PETER: *And if readers who pick this up pick up on this detail, it will convince them that this is something that a lot of thought has gone into.*

WENDY: Yes

PETER: *I know that often when I see adaptations of properties in other media, they don't go to all the trouble of getting everything right.*

WENDY: Well, I think it all depends on the property. One of the adaptations that I admire the most is **Walt Simonson's** adaptation of ALIEN. I'm still inspired by that, because . . . I would not say that he went for photographic detail in that, but what he did was absolutely capture the spirit of the film.

PETER: *Well, the actual details of all of the rooms in that spaceship don't matter as much in that.*

WENDY: Well, even as to the likeness of the characters, I think that there was some leeway for exaggeration for effect and so forth. But to me **Walt Simonson's** adaptation of ALIEN stands out as one of the most *exciting* and . . . I don't know whether I want to use the word reverent or respectful — *respectful* of its source adaptations that's ever been done. I often thought of that, as I was working on BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, and wanted to give that kind of respect for the source in what I'm doing.

"The stills are too posed, too artificial."

PETER: *Are you going to be able to do exact likenesses of the various cast members, or do you have to pretty much make them up?*

WENDY: No, I'm not making them up. Richard has helped me considerably. We set it up so that he could take a great deal of photo reference for me off of the television — I taped a lot of the shows, and Richard took many many photos. I would tape specific episodes where I knew there would be certain facial expressions or certain full figure shots that I might be able to use, and Richard took them right off of the screen. Republic Pictures did not really supply me with any photo reference, and all of the stills that I have seen so far are too posed, too artificial. It's much better to catch the figures in mid motion; it gives a truer likeness.

So, I have scads and scads of photo reference to work from, but what I'm trying to do is create what I like to call transcendent likenesses. Even though I'm using a specific photo reference, I might take a head shot and change the angle or the facial expression or move the eyes, in order to make the expression better fit whatever dialogue is taking place in that particular panel. One of the things that I find to be kind of awkward about adaptations done in graphic novel form is that when the artist uses photo references, they sometimes are so true to the photo references that it comes across as a bit stiff on the page. The image in the photo may not necessarily relate to what's going on in the story. So, I'm taking the likenesses, but I'm adding extra movement and depth according to what's needed in a given panel.

PETER: *Now, what can you tell us about the story?*

WENDY: *(Laughter.)* Well, as I said, this grew out of my experience on the set. At the time what they were looking for was something softer, more sentimental, more poetic, and a lot less cops 'n' robbers. But in any good story there has to be an element of conflict, so it was suggested that I include the villain Paracelsus in this story. So, after visiting the set I got the idea for PORTRAIT OF LOVE, and the basic plot is that Vincent and Catherine share a very special moment, a moment of triumph, and Vincent sees something in Catherine that he never saw before. It's so special to him that he wishes he could capture it in some way, and after some encouragement from another artist down in the tunnels, he makes an attempt at doing a portrait of Catherine.

But he can't *quite* get it right! Something's missing. So he goes to Father's library, looking for inspiration, and he happens upon one of Paracelsus's old journals, and in the writings of Paracelsus *before* he turned evil, Vincent finds the inspiration that he needs. He decides to follow the advice of what he's read, goes off by himself to paint the portrait, and nobody in the tunnels knows where he is or what he's doing or how long he'll be away. But when the portrait is finished, Vincent has accomplished what he set out to do - it's kind of a one-shot labor of love, he could *never* do it again, and it's truly a thing of beauty.

The interesting thing is *in* the story you never see the portrait, because I'm leaving it to the reader's imagination just what it is that Vincent has captured, because to each person it might be something different. But in any case, he gets what he wants. And there comes a point in the story where the portrait is left for a moment, and Paracelsus discovers it and decides to use it against Vincent, to lure him away and destroy him once and for all. And that's all I'm gonna tell ya! *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Besides Vincent and Catherine and Paracelsus, and I take it Father, are there other familiar characters from the show who turn up?*

WENDY: Yes, I tried to work in as many as possible. There's Mary and Jamie and Mouse and Elizabeth and Narcissa and . . . let's see . . . That's all that come to mind right now. There are also various tunnel people. I invented one, a little girl named Emily Anne.

PETER: *Now, it seems to me that since this is a story about, in part at least, being an artist, that this must have some sort of special resonance for you.*

WENDY: Absolutely, *especially* right now because I'm in my most intense period of working on the book. All of the final go-aheads, every last approval, came toward the middle of March, and that's when I really started to get going on the painting. The full layouts, the full script and everything, had been done. We decided to do the pages bypassing pencils, believe it or not. I'm using a coloring process which is mostly watercolor, but I did my layouts in prismacolor pencils, which is really neat because it doesn't erase, so it creates a nice, solid drawing that you can Xerox — this is what **Ron Koslow** saw and approved — but it also leaves a nice terra-cotta color on the page, and that is my base color. Over that I'm doing watercolor paintings. So essentially I bypassed the pencils altogether and went directly to color. But

"I wouldn't describe myself as a fan of the show."

even with that timesaving step, it's just kind of been murder since March. *(Laughter.)* Right now this is about all I do; I eat, I sleep, and I paint. I'm expecting to finish the book at the end of April. But I feel very much like Vincent now, I'm off by myself in a little cave. *(Laughter.)* I'm concentrating on finishing this thing, and I won't come out until I'm done.

PETER: *Trying to capture —?*

WENDY: I'm trying to capture the feeling I got when I first discovered the show. I came to it a little bit late; it had been on the air for a few episodes, and . . . I wouldn't describe myself as a *fan* of the show, I would say that I have a great respect for the show. I totally agree with the show's politics. When I saw it, I saw that the show dealt with so many themes that we had been dealing with in ELFQUEST for so many years, and I just kind of went, "Oh, this is completely familiar ground, I agree with this completely!" And that's what I am trying to capture in the book, my feelings of the rightness, the solidity of the concept, the dedication of the actors themselves.

I think one of the most *amazing* things about this show is the personal commitment and involvement of the actors, particularly **Ron Perlman**. I have a little trouble understanding how he does it. He is in that makeup up to eighteen hours a *day!* When I saw him he was filming three different episodes at once, because things were just starting up after the writers' strike and they were really rushing to get as many episodes out as quickly as possible. He seemed exhausted, but at the same time he was absolutely right there, and when he had to be Vincent he *was* Vincent. To me this is *extraordinary* strength of character, *extraordinary* commitment to one's profession — and apart from that he is, quite simply, a superb actor.

Also, **Linda Hamilton** is absolutely fascinating to me, because she is not one of these "window mannequin" beauties, she does not *look* like every other actress on the screen. It makes her particularly interesting to draw, because she has an extremely mobile, emotional face, and her eyes are extremely expressive. I really love drawing her. I think she's probably the only actress who could *possibly* upstage **Ron Perlman** in makeup. *(Laughter.)* I find her just as interesting to draw as Vincent.

PETER: *What specifically do you see as the themes that ELFQUEST and BEAUTY AND THE BEAST have in common?*

WENDY: Well, first and foremost, the

"It's a natural progression that I should slip into

element of "don't judge by appearances," the element of how different people react to the strange and the unknown, the magical, and the concept of tribe and family, which you find in the tunnels — these folk who have isolated themselves from the mainstream of society in order to build a better world for themselves, one that they can cope with. These are gentle people, *shy* people; they are perhaps not all that functional in the difficult, stressful society of the world up above, but they have found peace and harmony and family down below in those tunnels. I find that very similar to what we did with the Wolfriders, in terms of their holt, their safe place, their desire to just live and let live, and really to have a life that is as easy as possible, and only fight when they have to.

Vincent himself is a very magical character. He's very powerful, very archetypal, and there are a lot of things *about* him that I can relate to. He is an artist, he is a poet, he's soft-spoken, reserved, and doesn't necessarily have all that hot a self image. But he's overcome a great deal and has tremendous inner strength. There just seems to be a wealth of interesting possibilities in these characters.

PETER: *How long is this novel that you're doing right now?*

WENDY: The actual story itself is 48 pages long.

PETER: *Are there possibilities for sequels?*

WENDY: Well, we've already talked about that. As I said, all of the people at First are extremely supportive of the project, very excited about it, and they are anticipating good sales. As a matter of fact there are a number of trade shows that are going on right now, and word has been coming back to me through Richard and through **Rick Obadiah** that the response to the artwork has been very good. I suppose that I'm saying that with a little bit of a wry sense of humor, because some of the responses have been, **"Wendy Pini** didn't do this, that *can't* be her artwork, I thought she only did elves." You know, for ten years I've tried to prove that I am capable of doing things other than elves, by doing other projects, but I guess a lot of distributors and store owners have it very firmly in their minds that all I do is elves.

PETER: *I had heard you were doing this in a very different style than you are known for.*

WENDY: Yes. It's extremely realistic, the lighting and the settings and everything. You will *feel* like you're holding an episode of the show in your hand. This is an art style that I have been capable of always, but just haven't had that much opportunity to make use of. It's wonderful! It's refreshing and revitalizing to me as an artist to have a chance to use this particular style.

PETER: *Have you other projects in your future?*

WENDY: Well, obviously there is always something to do with ELFQUEST. ELFQUEST is an ongoing thing.

PETER: *ELFQUEST is eternal.*

WENDY: *(Laughter.)* ELFQUEST is eternal, yes. But as far as BEAUTY AND THE BEAST goes, there are a number of possibilities; one that I'm not really at liberty to talk about, but what I can say is that there is a possibility, assuming that the show is renewed this fall, that my connection with the show may be something else besides a graphic novel. That's all I can say. There have been some conversations in this direction.

PETER: *Does that mean you actually will get to play the prostitute? (Laughter.)*

WENDY: Who knows? I'll tell you, I wouldn't mind being a tunnel person, that might be kind of fun. I like the clothes they wear.

PETER: *Is there anything in the future* besides *ELFQUEST and BEAUTY AND THE BEAST?*

WENDY: To tell you the truth, all I really want to do is put this thing to bed and enjoy the summer, and enjoy people's reactions to it. I would be better able to tell you what's going on in the fall. There are a number of options open to me, and I kind of just want to get through the summer and make my choice after that. I'm going to take the summer off, definitely. This has been an enormous project. Essentially, it began last July when the wheels were put in motion, and it's been a hurry up and wait situation until, actually, January — the work came in stops and starts. That was kind of stressful. So, actually, when I finish this it will be about seven months that I have spent on the project, so I'm looking forward to taking a break.

PETER: *What do you hope the effect of*

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST from ELFQUEST."

your graphic novel will be on people who aren't already acquainted with BEAUTY AND THE BEAST?

WENDY: I'm glad you asked that question, Peter. When I first saw the show, my reaction to it was much the same as you would have to an endangered species — said to myself, "This thing is so good, it's *got* to be in danger of being cancelled!" I started to think right away about what I might be able to do to contribute some positive energy to it in some way, as a professional. I hope that the show is renewed. It had a rocky second season, and I think the voice and vision of the show got tangled up in the effects of the writers' strike and so forth. I think that the episodes that they've been showing towards the end of the second season have shown that they've gotten their voice and vision back, but it's a tough recovery and the ratings aren't terrific right now.

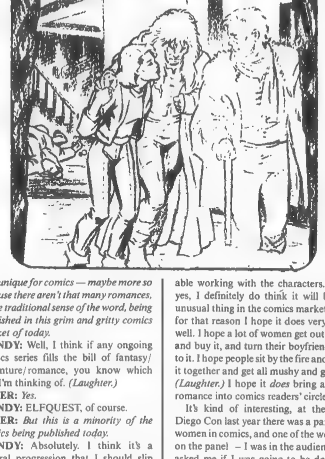
So, the people at First and myself, and I guess everybody who is rooting for the show, we're just crossing our fingers and hoping that it's going to be renewed. From what I heard from **Ron Koslow**, they're *expecting* to be renewed, but who knows? We just keep thinking positive. I think the show is very important, 1) because there is *nothing* else like it on the air, and 2) because its values are very important right now, the emphasis on family and caring and being sensitive to others' feelings, being in touch with someone else — it's anything *but* a cold show. It's a very warm show. And I feel that since there is nothing else like this on television right now, it's definitely contributing something special to the world, and I would like to see it continue.

So, what I'm hoping is that when someone walks by the graphic novel in a Waldenbooks who may never have seen the show, and they get intrigued by the artwork or whatnot and flip through it, they'll say, "Oh, I better catch this and see what it's all about." I just hope that it brings more support, more positive energy, to the show. I hope it contributes to the possibility of the show being renewed.

PETER: *But, of course, by the time the graphic novel comes out that decision might already have been made.*

WENDY: Well, I'm hoping that CBS's awareness that this product is being turned out contributes to their feelings that the show does have a life beyond this

PETER: *It also occurs to me that since BEAUTY AND THE BEAST is unique for network television, the property is*



also unique for comics — maybe more so because there aren't that many romances, in the traditional sense of the word, being published in this grim and gritty comics market of today.

WENDY: Well, I think if any ongoing comics series fills the bill of fantasy/adventure/romance, you know which one I'm thinking of. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Yes.*

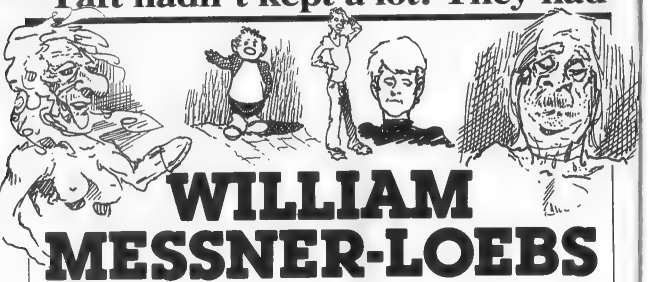
WENDY: ELFQUEST, of course.

PETER: *But this is a minority of the comics being published today.*

WENDY: Absolutely. I think it's a natural progression that I should slip into doing BEAUTY AND THE BEAST from having done ELFQUEST, because the politics are similar, the values are similar, the sensitivities are similar, and I feel very much as if I am on my home ground. I feel extremely comfortable working with the characters. And yes, I definitely do think it will be an unusual thing in the comics market, and for that reason I hope it does very very well. I hope a lot of women get out there and buy it, and turn their boyfriends on to it. I hope people sit by the fire and read it together and get all mushy and gooey. *(Laughter.)* I hope it *does* bring a little romance into comics readers' circles.

It's kind of interesting, at the San Diego Con last year there was a panel of women in comics, and one of the women on the panel – I was in the audience — asked me if I was going to be doing a romance comic any time in the near future. At the time we were still in the process of negotiating, so I couldn't say anything. So, I just sort of sat there and grinned like I had something up my sleeve. *(Laughter.)*

"Taft hadn't kept a lot. They had



WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEBS

William Messner-Loebs and I have this way of bumping into each other. I've only been to three all-comics conventions as an official guest, yet all three times (in Houston, Detroit and San Diego) the "Ol' Scout" was there to make the weekend more enjoyable. Either Bill goes to a lot of conventions or I've been exceptionally lucky (probably both). Nel many of the artists I've met really want to talk about comics the way Bill and I do, so whenever we meet, we cover a lot of ground (as our transcriber discovered when he got the tapes, Ouch! Sorry about that).

SCOTT McCLOUD: *JONNY QUEST seems to be quite a special book to a lot of people. It attracted some big names. What do you think its special appeal was?*

BILL LOEBS: Well, that's a good question. I think largely its appeal was chronological. You tend to find it more appealing the younger you were when it first came on. I was, I guess, in my late teens when it came on, so I tended to notice more of its problems. I looked at it a little more so I tended to notice more of its problems. I looked at it a little more technically, in terms of animation and that sort of thing, than a lot of people seem to have. And I *also* think that a lot of the appeal is, even though the kids are treated like kids and the dog is treated like a dog — in that no one is particularly precocious — they are treated as *adult* members of the expedition. There's none of this, "Gosh, these are ten-year-old kids. We should leave them at home and go have the adventure, Race."

SCOTT: *It's not as condescending as some other things.*

BILL: Yeah. I think there's a lot of that. That was something that struck me when I read the original TOM SWIFT books also, where even though his father was an inventor — theoretically pretty clever — his father was invariably wrong. Tom was always coming up with things and his father was invariably wrong. Tom was always coming up with things and his father would end up, "Oh, you were right, Tom. This was just the perfect time to invent an atomic tank."

SCOTT: *That's a very '80s attitude isn't it? We've seen that a lot in the cinema recently.*

BILL: Yeah, usually with authority figures that are somehow abstracted once or twice from being *actual* parents.

SCOTT: *Right. A guardian or an uncle.*

BILL: Yeah. As a matter of fact I was reading a book which was analyzing old fairy tales in terms of Freudian symbols, and it said that the reason that you had all of these evil step-mothers was not that there were more step-mothers back then than now, but that it's a way of hating your own mother without having to actually deal with hating your own mother. That's

The entire cast of Bill's JOURNEY: The Adventures of Wolverine MacAlistaire.

All artwork accompanying this interview is © 1989 William Messner-Loebs, unless otherwise noted

to go to Jonny Quest Fandom."

"Reading is a different experience

THUP THUP THUP THUP
LOOK, DAD! IT'S JADE AND RAGE WITH THE REST OF THE SUPPLIES.
GOOD. I WANT TO GET TO THE CITY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
TIME LOST
WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEBS WRITER
STEVE RUDE ARTIST
MIKE ROYER INKER
MATT WAGNER COLORIST
BOB PINAHA LETTERER
DIANA SCHUTZ EDITOR
© 1989 Hanna-Barbera Productions, Inc

First panel from a JONNY QUEST story (Loebs, Rude, Royer, Wagner, Pinaha & Schutz).

also the reason that the witches traditionally have a hood thrown over their features. They're really hiding features that you don't want to see because it would be too traumatic to have to realize that that's who you're hating.

SCOTT: *So you think on a milder level that that kind of surrogate character was showing up in JONNY QUEST?*

BILL: Well, yeah.

SCOTT: *Obviously not with his . . .*

BILL: We're actually talking about the sort of youth exploitation films where the young people trash the university presidents or the girlfriend's father or something like that — real obvious avoiding of trashing your own parents. One of the really neat things about RISKY BUSINESS, one of the things that makes it something more than just exploitation, was that it's actually dealing with saying this out loud. The more direct you are the more it approaches art, even if it's about things that may seem exploitative.

SCOTT: *Well, getting back to JONNY QUEST before he gets away . . .* (Laughter) *How was your working relationship with Taft Entertainment? Did you submit works in progress to them for approval?*

BILL: Yes. Every step along the way is submitted, not by me but by **Diana Schutz,** who acts sort of like a clearing house for all of this massive amount of information that goes through

SCOTT: *How deeply involved are they with the actual production of the stories and whatnot?*

BILL: Well, they haven't been at all involved up to now except in being real interested. What I essentially did was work up twelve story ideas and submitted them and they liked them all, and I submitted my first script and they liked that one, and so forth and so on.

than living through something."

SCOTT: *So you just had basic guidelines to work from? The ball was really in your court? You can craft it however you like?*

BILL: Yeah. You know, they were not real sure what we were going to be presenting them with, really. The people that you're talking to here are basically marketing people and not real in touch with comic books. They hadn't seen much of anything that any of us had produced. It isn't like we met them at conventions.

SCOTT: *It's not like dealing with Action For Children's Television.*

BILL: No. *(Laughter.)* They basically said something along the lines of, obviously, no strong swearing, no sex... *(Laughter.)* The real obvious kinds of things. I was real amazed, as a matter of fact. There was an episode — when I got to see it on videotape — that had hinged around Dr. Quest distilling an hallucinatory drug to keep astronauts minds busy while they were in space; so they were all trying to keep bad guys from stealing this LSD derivative! *(Laughter.)*

SCOTT: *Well, I hear that JONNY QUEST was one of the very first of its kind produced for TV, is that right?*

BILL: I think it's supposed to have been the first attempt to do a live-action type of feature, adventure...

SCOTT: *Live-action style animation.*

BILL: Yeah, for TV. It's real interesting to see. I think the one problem that they had was that, having to work as fast as they were and with as much limited-animation as they had, strong emotions, and especially strong, subtle emotions, were very difficult — which is why they tended to create central characters which tended to be restrained. You have a scientist, you have a C.I.A. agent, you know; and these are people that you would expect to react in a very mindful way.

SCOTT: *More stoney expressions than, say, Donald Duck.*

BILL: Right *(Laughter.)*

SCOTT: *Well, JONNY QUEST may've been the news of the day, but I think at the time you were probably most identified still with your own creation, JOURNEY. It's probably one of the most unique books on the market. Do you think that the market has loosened up or maybe tightened up, in relation to the real idiosyncratic books like JOURNEY and, say, TALES OF THE BEANWORLD or NEIL THE HORSE?*

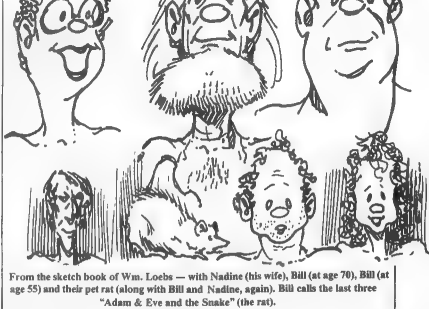
BILL: Well, there's a lot of debate on that right now, and most everybody is saying that the market has tightened up because there is so much material being put out now and there's so much speculation going on that almost nobody has any money left to buy anything that is not immediately speculateable. Now, the only thing I have, as the eternal optimist, to put against that is that four years ago the only place I had to be published was in a small garage in Wyandotte, Michigan, where somebody was putting out comic books and having no place to sell them, really. Three years ago **Larry Marder** was talking around TALES OF THE BEANWORLD at Chicagocons and handing them out as Xeroxes. So the fact that we're here at all for people to say that nobody's buying us is *something* to be said. *(Laughter.)*

SCOTT: *I agree. It has happened awfully fast, too. When you look at it in the context of comics history, four years isn't a long time.*

BILL: No. Now what I do think is ... I somehow or another missed the entire underground — not in terms of reading it but in terms of being able to participate in it. I'm not real sure what that scene was like. I've read interviews with **Trina Robbins**, for example, where she felt very constricted being one of the members of the underground; that she pretty much felt that she had to incorporate certain subjects and so forth and she just didn't feel very comfortable being a part of it at all. **Mort Sahl** said in one of his routines that he never really has much sympathy for artists who say that they're being restricted because artists only use 10% of the freedom they have anyway. I *sort of* felt that was the case with the undergrounds. Certainly the stories that I have in my head and that I'm telling are pretty much the same sort of stories I would have told if I had been an underground cartoonist. I would have *expected* for them to have been published. *(Laughter.)* You know, you look at something like the HAROLD HEDD series, for example — even though that was concerned with sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll, to a degree, you could see it going in other directions. You could see it really opening up a whole different kind of an adventure format for people.

SCOTT: *So really what we're saying is both in the case of the undergrounds and the independents that the real important distinction is between those who use the freedom they have and those who don't, who have their own personal restrictions that they can't overcome.*

BILL: I think probably. I think that if you aren't talking about things that are important to you then you really *are* a hack. I mean, it's not that difficult to jerk people off — to be real gross about it — and I don't think that's the end of art, to figure out the grossest possible way you could pull people's strings and then pull 'em. My feelings about reading and writing and thinking are things that keep



From the sketch book of Wm. Loebs — with Nadine (his wife), Bill (at age 70), Bill (at age 55) and their pet rat (along with Bill and Nadine, again). Bill calls the last three "Adam & Eve and the Snake" (the rat).

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"We found ourselves out in the street."

coming out in my work. The notion that people are going to continually surprise you. Strength is not always strength. Just going after a thing in the strongest possible way is not necessarily the way to get it in the long run.

For example, there's a lot of revenge motif now, and you're sort of a pantywaist or a wimp if you suggest to people that *maybe* revenge is not what you ought to be going after in life, that maybe it *isn't* good for you. It's seen as being too idealistic to live, and that comes from people that have never really shot somebody, who've never really had to get this very fleeting pleasure of revenge. I don't think that these are concerns that are unique with me. I think they come up with anybody who thinks.

SCOTT: *But you've managed to present them in a unique way.*

BILL: I try to come up with as different a way of looking at things as possible because I think it's more interesting. And also it's not real possible for me . . . I'm not one of these guys who has trained for 20 years and can draw everything in any possible position and make it explicable. I can generally draw what's closest to my heart easiest.

Like, for example, it would be very hard for me to do an extended gunfight. The sort of thing that they do so easily in the simplest war comic is something that's almost totally beyond me from a technical point of view. I just don't have the ability to do all of that hardware and make it look realistic, and to believe that that's really the important thing in a certain sense, because while I'm doing all these guys fighting with each other and blowing each other up I'm thinking about the guy — and that's real, right; that's war — but war is also this kid down here with a pulp comic, getting off on it while the bullets are whistling over his head.

The first time I ever got to see cows up close, for example; cows are *real* frightening. Cows are not like Bossie and Elmer and all of those cute cows that you see on television. Cows are enormous, and they have these kind of flat, dead eyes, and you say, "They would just as soon stampede over me as not." There would be absolutely nothing that you could do about it. You see these films where the guy grabs his saddle and hold it in front of him and all of the wild cattle will surge around him — you just see how unreasonable that is! That's sort of when I began to realize how big everything is out in the wilderness. Even though I never did see an actual bear, that was the genesis of the bear chase; where I was trying to counteract this notion of the brave pioneer with his bronzed, sinewy muscles, stands up and grabs the bear by the throat and drives his Bowie knife into his heart. It don't happen. The bear would not even notice you grabbing it by its throat. You're talking something that weighs close to a ton and is seven feet long, you know, moving at about the rate of a lorry. You're dead is what it is! *(Laughter.)* You're dead before you even know it hit you.

SCOTT: *I think that the bear was a real revelation for a lot of people. Even though that's the one issue of JOURNEY that I haven't read, I've been able to tell from the letters that it came as a surprise, I*

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Gilbert's Mr. Monster meets (teams) with Loebs' Wolverine MacAlistaire.

"I didn't like to be called a car-

Bill's solo tryout page for MR. MONSTER — his first attempt at drawing the character.

™ ©1993 Michael T. Gilbert

guess, to a lot of your readers that a bear could be just as effective a menace, if not more so, than some world-shattering demi-god or super-villain.

BILL: Yeah. I think there's a real tendency in fiction — not just in comics — to up the ante, so that people have no notion of how things really work or how hard or easy things are to do. For example, in the heat of battle a *really* strong guy with *really* strong teeth pulls out a grenade pin with his teeth and throws it. Now, the first time that happened that indicated exactly what kind of a position he was in. He didn't care about his teeth. He did not care about anything except getting this grenade off, and so it was extremely dramatic.

Well, by the time you have 40 years worth of using this, the first thing they have to do with a Marine recruit is to train them not to pull grenade pins out with their teeth. *(Laughter.)* You do *enormous* damage to your teeth and you probably won't pull out the grenade pin. One of the reasons is that you carry grenades by their pins, so that they're real nice and convenient and so when you have to get rid of them in a hurry you grab them and pull with all your might and the pin comes out. These pins are *in* there. People that make grenades *know* that they explode. They *don't* want the pins jostling out!

SCOTT: *Well, this idea of upping the ante is very relevant now. Twenty years ago it was enough to see Spider-Man catch a robber in his web. Now it's not enough that we have one all-powerful deity, we need twelve or fourteen all ganging up in the Omnipotence Squad.*

BILL: Yeah. I think that there's a sort of an evolution that goes on where you're really into the characters and then you're into the artists and then you're into the notion of comics as a medium, and I think that only comes with time.

Well, to give one short example, I can remember the first time . . . I was reading a lot of pulp detective stories, and I picked up mostly SHELL SCOTT. Those of you who do not know what SHELL SCOTT is like, it's sort of like a really jazzy California version of MAGNUM. I thought it was like **Dostoyevski** when I was thirteen. I was picking up other books

toonist. I was a comic-book artist."

© 1989 Michael T. Gilbert

Bill—a few suggestions re fine-tuning mm.
Slick, very neat Mr.
Longer nose—mouth closer to nose. Larger chin. Square face. Thick neck.
mm is a character whose identity is very much defined by his appearance! He is sharp! His features should be equally crisp & sharply defined. He is always on—always alert. It is very rare to find him looking relaxed or nonchalant (after all—one must always be alert for the teeming hoards of monsters that can appear at any time!) He should never look "shlumpy"
(He is filthy rich, after all)
MTG—
No.

Michael T. Gilbert's suggestions for changes in Bill's version (Lightboxed over the page Bill drew.) These were done before MR. MONSTER #1.

too, but I thought this private detective stuff was just great. And came time when I ran across a book by an author I'd never heard of before but it looked really jazzy. It had this big, tough-looking detective on the cover, sort of like a tinted black-and-white photograph, and everything looked really good, and he had the big gun under his arm,, and it was in the tradition of **Mickey Spillane.** It looked great. It was the most boring book I had ever read. *(Laughter.)* Boring and depressing.

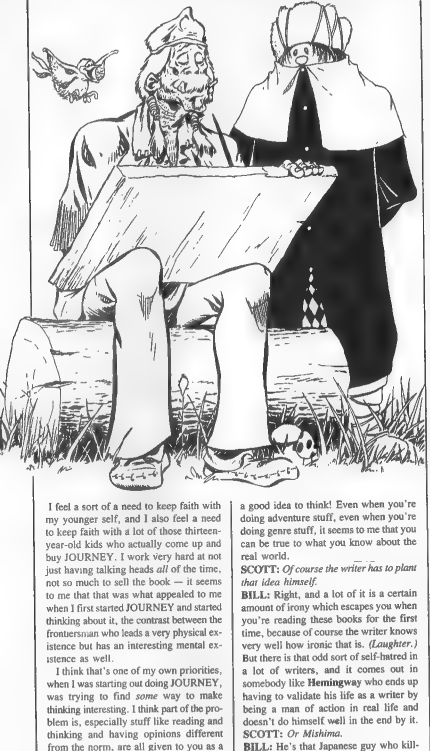
SCOTT: *Bill Loebs learns that you can't judge a book by its cover. (Laughter.)*

BILL: I couldn't stand it. About 20 years later, I had gotten out of detective books because I had found them getting pretty predictable, and had gone through science fiction and a whole bunch of other things, and happened to stumble across SLEEPING BEAUTY by **Ross MacDonald** and was immediately overwhelmed by how wonderful it was and started buying all of the **Ross MacDonald** books. Well, of course, I ran across this same book which was so incredibly boring when I was thirteen, and it was sort of *luminous* with brilliance when I was 30. People were just sitting around and talking and, you know, what I had found so depressing at thirteen was realism. *(Laughter.)* So I have a lot of sympathy for the kids that come up to me at conventions and look at my book and flip through it and see all of these people in buckskins sitting around talking and say, "This is *like* a comic book, huh?" *(Laughter.)*

SCOTT: *We can sympathize, certainly, with that desire for something other than what we're actually providing. Really, you are writing for yourself and for the people with tastes similar to yours, as opposed to condescending or pampering to an audience.*

BILL: I certainly hope so. I certainly hope that's what I'm doing. I'm doing that with JOURNEY as much as I possibly can, and being as honest about it as I possibly can; and trying to be to a degree, perhaps, true to that person that wanted to do this when he was 23. There are a *lot* of plot ideas that sort of get taken a little more straight adventure, and get sort of twisted around now I'm approaching 40 — he says reaching for the arsenic bottle. *(Laughter.)*

"Some things can only be said so



I feel a sort of a need to keep faith with my younger self, and I also feel a need to keep faith with a lot of those thirteen-year-old kids who actually come up and buy JOURNEY. I work very hard at not just having talking heads *all* of the time, not so much to sell the book — it seems to *me* that that was what appealed to me when I first started JOURNEY and started thinking about it, the contrast between the frontiersman who leads a very physical existence but has an interesting mental existence as well.

I think that's one of my own priorities, when I was starting out doing JOURNEY, was trying to find *some* way to make thinking interesting. I think part of the problem is, especially stuff like reading and thinking and having opinions different from the norm, are all given to you as a kid and, you know, this is good for you like enemas and castor oil and stuff, but nobody explains *why* this is also fun, why it's *better* to have opinions that are your own, *why* it's a good idea to read, *why* it's a good idea to think! Even when you're doing adventure stuff, even when you're doing genre stuff, it seems to me that you can be true to what you know about the real world.

SCOTT: *Of course the writer has to plant that idea himself.*

BILL: Right, and a lot of it is a certain amount of irony which escapes you when you're reading these books for the first time, because of course the writer knows very well how ironic that is. *(Laughter.)* But there is that odd sort of self-hatred in a lot of writers, and it comes out in somebody like **Hemingway** who ends up having to validate his life as a writer by being a man of action in real life and doesn't do himself well in the end by it.

SCOTT: *Or Mishima.*

BILL: He's that Japanese guy who killed himself, right?

SCOTT: *Yeah, trying to find the balance. Do you feel as if you're sometimes fighting an uphill battle in trying to get across very literate and non-visual ideas in a very visual medium?*

BILL: To a degree. I try to...it seems to me that one of the most interesting things about human beings is the fact that they read. Reading is a different experience than just living through something.

SCOTT: *Right. It takes place on a totally different level.*

BILL: And quite often reading about something can clarify things for you that just living through them wouldn't. It lets you make use of that space behind your eyes that people talk about, that they talk about in **Julian James'** THE BREAKDOWN OF THE BICAMERAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

SCOTT: *I don't know that one.*

BILL: Oh. That actually got mentioned in a couple of comic books during the '70s. It was a big thing. It's the theory that the two sides of our brains tend to talk to each other and sort of triangulate and that's the reason that we have that sense of space behind our eyes that other animals don't have and that early man may not have had, which I find a fascinating concept.

SCOTT: *I was aware of that phenomenon, I just wasn't familiar with the book.*

BILL: They were saying, for example, that **Odysseus** probably didn't have that concept of past and future, he was just constantly living in the present — sort of like **Elvis.** *(Laughter.)*

SCOTT: *That's an interesting analogy. JOURNEY is certainly a reading man's comic. Do you feel that there are any basic differences between comics and prose, in reference to what they're capable of? Where do you think those barriers lie? Is there any sort of subject matter that's better adapted to one or the other?*

BILL: Well, I think sort of as a basic idea that you could probably do the same sort of idea in any medium; but having said that, there are some medias that are very much easier to do certain ideas in. Boy, am I talking funny. It sounds like I'm drunk or something.

SCOTT: *No. That makes perfect sense.*

BILL: And at some point you have to say it's going to-take so much energy to get this idea across, or this mass of idea, that it's better to do it in another way, in another medium: And I also think that every medium does one thing superbly well, so the people tend to be drawn towards it.

SCOTT: *Do you have any fears that in comic books it may be superheroes? That's what they've been saying for awhile now.*

BILL: I think it's a little broader than that. I think it's fantasy. Comics do fantasy

often before people act on them."

superbly well, and it's, as everybody says, because the special effects are so easy.

SCOTT: *And so cheap. And so quick. Imagination is that element that comics have, at least in the hands of the author, in abundance.*

BILL: Yes. You can be literal as you want, or as imaginative as you want. And comics also seem to be very, very good in terms of expressionism. If we're going to say, for example, the difference between impressionism and expressionism: impressionism being a person's impression of what the real world is like whereas expressionism is the artist expressing what's inside his own head.

SCOTT: *And your own work? Certainly JOURNEY falls more in the latter category. What you're doing is very expressionistic.*

BILL: Yeah. I also think that you tend to find your own level of realism that you're comfortable with. I know that when I was starting out to draw *very* realistically I couldn't make it all come together for me. I couldn't make the backgrounds and the figures and the heads all look *right* together. When I decided to go a little more cartooney then suddenly everything snapped into place. Sort of the same sort of epiphany that **Fred Hembeck** writes about having after his interview with **Vinnie Coletta.** *(Laughter.)*

SCOTT: *That's such a good extreme example.*

BILL: Then a couple of years ago I decided that I really liked the notion of being a cartoonist — having seen a lot of the stuff that is being published now in NEMO and having a stronger grasp on what cartooning is all about, and the fact that my stuff got a little broader too, in the interim. I really began to like the idea of a very simplified look. Now I've had to retrain all of my relatives to think of me being a cartoonist all over again.

But one of the things that I ended up reading was **Fred Hembeck's** stuff, and in fact that particular little article on how he sort of found *his* style after an interview with **Vinnie Coletta;** and I thought here I am, devastated too, maybe I can come up with some cartooning style and establish some aspect of my career. And I did. I went home and redrew a very realistic and boring strip that I had been trying to put together to submit to Kitchen Sink. My new cartooning style seemed to work very nicely, and I sent it off and they bought it and that was the first thing I ever sold.

SCOTT: *And this was what year?*

BILL: This must have been '81, maybe.

Happy Birthday to Kit (Redwine).

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"Gary Groth finds my standards low."

I had the longest genesis of any cartoonist somewhere around '71, and it was '82 or something before I really got started.

SCOTT: *Oh, that's not all that long. Some people decided they wanted to be cartoonists in '47 and they're still trying. (Laughter.)*

BILL: That's true.

SCOTT: *It's pretty frightening. And, of course, you have the ultimate because you have your own book. JOURNEY is one you do everything on. So you've had experience as a writer/artist with JOURNEY, as a writer on JONNY QUEST, drawing other people's stories.*

BILL: I've had experience working from sort of a Marvel-style plot with **John Ostrander** on "Munden's Bar." So I've done it all now. It's time to retire. *(Laughter.)* .

SCOTT: *Do you think that in collaborative efforts, like so many comics these days, that camaraderie can sometimes be an end in itself —*

BILL: Well, I think of it in terms of what little I know about alchemy: In the olden days they talked about the philosophers' stone and this endless search for this ability to turn base metal into gold, and they always said that that was the end. That wasn't the end. What the alchemists were attempting to do was to endlessly purify metals and substances. They believed that when you purified something, like distilling water over and over and over again, it turned into something else eventually, and that by the process of doing this over and over again you were yourself purified and changed. The ultimate thing is not to turn base metal into gold but to turn yourself into something better

SCOTT: *So, even as you were trying to produce a really good issue of MR. MONSTER you were at the same time trying to produce a better Bill Loebs, is that what you're saying?*

BILL: Well, and that in the process of collaboration with another person, especially in terms of MR. MONSTER, that at the very least I was in contact with **Michael Gilbert**, who is one of nature's noblemen. Just the process of being in a creative situation with someone else is such a joy that the work doesn't necessarily become secondary but what you are creating between the two of you on a human level becomes an equal act of creation, which is why I sometimes get into these situations. The fun of collaborating with **Valentino** was as much fun as whatever good or bad JOURNEY might have come out of it.

SCOTT: *So the balance is really very important, of having both of those experiences?*

Eisner's Spirit with Loebs' MacAlistaire.

BILL: You have to keep in mind that if what you're saying is all I am worth is this pile of aging newsprint, you know, then you're not saying very much. You have to somehow find a way, when you are in the midst of doing all of this hard work, of having fun, of enjoying your life. Sometimes you find that just by the act of collaboration. That's *not* a bad thing. It's not *bad* to enjoy yourself! I guess that's another subtext I try to work into JOURNEY whenever I can. Wolverine is a very internal person, but I don't think he's a dour person necessarily. He tries to get as much fun out of life as he can

SCOTT: *Well, certainly you've attacked comics from all angles. You must have, at this point, a pretty balanced view of the different functions of the writer and the artist and whatnot. How do you think the roles break down? Do you see one as being somehow preeminent? Would you give more authority to one or the other?*

BILL: Well, it seems to me that there has to be a controlling force at some stage. It can be almost anybody, but if you're going to be successful then you have to have somebody sort of watching out, seeing how the ink falls as it were I've had

"There's nothing more of a drag than

writers tell me, you know, "Don't give those artists any slack at all 'cause most of them can't tell a story worth a damn." *(Laughter.)* Then the artists take me aside and tell me horror stories about writers who have them doing two different actions with one person in one panel and then not understanding why it didn't come out that way. I don't think the real conflict here is between artist and writer. Somebody has to have a real commitment to the project, a unified vision of it. I have no problem. For example, I've off and on had letters on JOURNEY, and that's pretty much the way I work. Nadine quite often does background. So, you know, I'm not a complete auteur here.

SCOTT: *But you are the auteur on JOURNEY if anyone is.*

BILL: Yes. I am the person who pretty much has the final say and who has to be responsible for what's happening, and who can say, you know, "We'll have the trees sort of fade back like that and so forth."

SCOTT: *Well, at least that particular problem has maybe subsided a bit as far as creative people working together because we've seen such a boom in the number of one-man shows in comics. Writer/artists have been coming out of the woodwork.*

BILL: And I think it's sort of because that's the natural form. Almost everybody starts out being a writer/artist. Almost everybody who started out in the early comics were writer/artists. It was a perfectly natural notion to have, and it's only when the amount of realism and the amount of detail needed to sell your work was so intense that you had to have a specialist come in who could draw like the blazes and it didn't matter whether he wrote or not, and when the scripts were bought so cheaply that you had to have a writer doing two or three books just to survive, that you get this dichotomy.

SCOTT: *Specialization is really the cycle in all of the arts. That's just the natural progression. You begin with those who have the raw talent and move towards those who have the more refined talent, are more specialized.*

BILL: Well, yes. The same sort of thing happened very rapidly once before in the engraving business. As soon as engraving began to be real popular as a way of turning out stuff very fast, wood engraving, you went from people who were doing both to people that were just basically doing watercolor washes on whitewashed wood and turning them over to professional engravers to cut into a line.

SCOTT: *Even Gustav Dore had professional engravers didn't he?*

BILL: He's a good example. He's sort of the **John Buscema** of engraving. *(Laughter.)* If you really want to see how

these endless comic book feuds."

different inkers operate then you see how they look inking **John Buscema.** His style is so obvious and open that a lot of different people can work on it. **Gustav Dore** was the same way.

SCOTT: *So, you're of the opinion that fine art is really another word for pure art which doesn't compromise it's initial goals?*

BILL: Yeah.

SCOTT: *Is that what you're trying to do in your own work?*

BILL: Yeah, although also in JONNY I've worked real hard not to say things I don't believe just because I'm just doing a kids book. I have compromised remarkably little in terms of what I wanted to say. What I've mostly done is a more compacted, more *linear* story; one that was complete in every issue and with a limited cast of characters.

SCOTT: *The former qualification, really, is a departure from JOURNEY where the stories went on for quite some time.*

BILL: Yeah. What I actually have *tried* to do in JOURNEY is to *teach* myself how to do comics, more than anything. I've tried not to say I can't do this or I can't do that. I always say to myself, "Well, let's see *if* I can do it." Let's see if I can actually do a really long detective story, for example. It wasn't completely successful, but I learned an awful lot from it.

SCOTT: *That's one of the most important differences between our generation of artists and, really, the generation that came right before us — is that we have that freedom to make our mistakes and learn from them.*

BILL: And, you know, it's just . . . there is some sort of quote about the power of a hidden truth when it becomes apparent. Some things, they can only be said so often before people will act on them. People were talking about giving back artwork for a *long* time, and talking about the poor rates people were being paid and so forth, and all that was really required was for somebody to come along with enough money to start up a third company and start bidding to make all that suddenly become real obvious. Those would be the first two things that anybody would ask for, more money and their artwork back.

SCOTT: *That essentially happened in the first of the independents, which loyalty demands I mention included very prominently my own company. Eclipse was a real pioneer in just that area.*

BILL: And I think it sort of roared from there. There are genies you just can't put back in the bottle again.

SCOTT: *Right. Even if the independent market were to suffer a major slump, some of the changes that have been made are here for good. Do you think then that all*

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"I got a couple of pieces of hate mail."

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Panel from DC's FLASH #22 (Jan. 1989) . . . written by Bill (art: LaRocque & Mahlstedt).

of the people who made all the noise before also really had a hand in making those changes? Do you think that the role of the critic has a real active effect?

BILL: I think to a degree, especially a critic who has in some way some other bona fide reason than being a critic. There was a really interesting article about **Pauline Kael.**

SCOTT: *Critic for the New York Times?*

BILL: Yeah, movie critic. Basically this person was saying that because that was *all* that she did that there was a real tendency for her to try to make more of her position, that she pretty much had to form a coterie around her, and her criticisms became more and more extreme until it's impossible to find any kind of middle ground between the films that she likes and the films that she hates. It becomes almost a cult personality.

SCOTT: *Have you seen that phenomenon in comics?*

BILL: Not so much, I think, because there's nobody in comics with as much power as people have out in the mainstream, yet. But I think one of the problems that the JOURNAL has, for example, is that for a long time the criticism was real intense and the standards — everyone was sort of encouraged to clarify their own standards to the extent that nothing could live up to it. In fact one critic wrote a column and said that there was no such thing as existing good art, there was only bad art. The only good art was art that hadn't been done yet.

SCOTT: *I don't recall that one.*

BILL: It was in his interview with a bunch of funny animal characters from the alternates, basically saying how stupid all of these funny animal characters from the alternatives are. *(Laughter.)* This was awhile ago. As a matter of fact it was one of the things that I parodied in JOURNEY that got everybody so amazed.

SCOTT: *Oh, yes. Your character Elmer Allen Kraft does play the critic at one point, is that the scene that you're thinking of?*

BILL: Yeah, and he basically paraphrased one or two of the most egregious examples in this style of criticism in the JOURNAL. My whole feeling on it is it's not so much, you know, gee, this is bad. I think mostly what it is is when there is something really bad, when there is something really important, you've used up all of your adjectives getting mad at some little piece of dreck that somebody did real fast late at night, you know. You're saying that that's the worst thing that ever happened in comics and that this guy is a total fraud and everything, and it comes along that somebody is really bad, or when some situation is really bad, you've cried wolf once too often and nobody will listen to you.

SCOTT: *So, I would guess that we would both agree that we probably have a lot of the same goals as some of the more stringent critics, but maybe we feel that they are directing their attacks somewhat unnecessarily at some targets that don't deserve that attention, is that it?*

BILL: Well, to a degree. I have long debates with **Gary Groth** about this. He finds my standards not only abysmally low

"That's my essential flaw, that

Uttle below...
IT'S E MARGE DOWN HERE. AHA! A GLOWING TRAIL.
A TRAIL OF POISON!
THE YELLOW DEATH!
BACK, DEVILS!
WITH LUCK, IT SHOULD LEAD ME STRAIGHT TO THE GHOUL VILLAGE!
GADS! I HATE KAKA AND BABY TURTL
© 1989 Michael T. Gilbert
FTWP
GOOD LORD! THE GHOUL VILLAGE! BUT THEY'RE ALL DEAD!"
HMMM! THIS COLONY S JUST BE.OW THE MUNICIPAL SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT.
THIS POISON IS AFTER BOURNE! IT MAY ALREADY BE IN THE CITY'S WATER SUPPLY...
- DAWN!

"YELLOW DEATH," a short story from MR. MONSTER #5 (story & art by Wm. Loebs.)

but *amazingly* abysmally low

SCOTT: *These are your standards for what you enjoy reading as opposed to your standards for your own work?*

BILL: Right.

SCOTT: *Do you find those to be very different?*

BILL: I do.

SCOTT: *Does Gary find them to be very different?* (Laughter.)

BILL: Actually, he does. He finds them to be amazingly different. I am perfectly willing to read through a book that I would only endorse, if somebody was making me endorse, 50% of it; and I'm not sure that's a bad average, really, considering how fast most of us have to turn this stuff out.

SCOTT: *The fact is that none of us hit 100%. Do you think it can help sometimes if an artist doesn't have too many comics behind him when he starts drawing? Do you think it might actually be good to draw in a vacuum for awhile?*

BILL: Possibly. You tend to gravitate towards artists who have your natural style anyway. My stuff had always been heavily shadowed and so forth and, not particularly cartooney, sort of ironic, and so I fell right into **Will Elsner** when I first saw it. In fact I *knew* I was gonna like it before I even saw it. I read a description of what the artwork looked like in **Jules Feiffer's** THE GREAT COMIC BOOK HEROES, and even though he didn't have a good illustration of **Elsner** in that article, I just knew that I was going to love his style.

SCOTT: *He just sounded like your kind of artist.*

BILL: Yeah.

SCOTT: *People do still see you as very much an Eisner influenced artist, but you've managed to get past that and develop your own style*

What do you think about the practice of paying homage, of tracing or copying something and actually pointing it out to the readers that you've done just that.

BILL: Oh. Well I think that's sort of fun, actually.

And I think the other thing that's happened is the big companies have gotten to be so suit-happy, protecting their copyrights so much... You know, Marvel has set an example a couple of times now, but DC has been doing it consistently over the years in terms of Superman. And theoretically you have to change that at some point. It's reaching the point now where *everyone* is afraid of doing any kind of comment or any kind of anything — any kind of comment about bad things the majors do. They're afraid they are gonna be sued.

SCOTT: *Certainly parody is under attack, not just in comics but in other media as well. The Garbage Pail Kids stickers from Tops have been drawn into a lawsuit with Cabbage Patch.*

BILL: That's true. And, again, it's pretty much somebody with a lot of money coming in and, you know, saying we're going to rough you up. You know, essentially, in the case of those, from the stickers that I've seen they don't look that close — and especially considering how Cabbage Patch evolved. The notion of taking a soft sculpture which people have been doing in their basements in a cottage industry for years and then cheapening it by putting it into plastic and regularizing it and cutting away all of those people's incomes, pretty much... distressing. The whole point of their suit being that the Garbage Pail Kids are somehow destroying the good name of the Cabbage Patch Kids

I'm a very organic artist."

— you know, it seems almost impossible to *do* that. *(Laughter.)*

SCOTT: *So, do you think that in the case of DC's protection of some of their major characters, and maybe Marvel's protection of theirs, do you think that they may have perhaps gone overboard at times? Certainly they do have a legal problem there, that if they don't protect it in every case then their claims to that mark or that character will be weakened.*

BILL: Yeah, it's true, but it still seems to me that your best protection is quality. You know, if somebody else came out with a Superman, with the same costume and everything, I can't imagine that DC would have any trouble. Where would they start having problems? The problem comes from the idea that somebody would actually start using their character in a lunchpail sort of thing, which is where they get a lot of their money. I don't know. I feel real ambivalent about the whole topic because no, you don't want people coming in and ripping you off — I would hate to have somebody come in and take McAlistaire and put him on a lunchpail, after all — but on the other hand we are reaching a point in this society where we are absolutely hamstrung with laws and with suits and being afraid of suits. So people don't talk anymore, and don't express strong opinions in public forum, don't talk straight; and I think it's a very disturbing trend.

SCOTT: *But certainly we have a case there of, there's a great big long word for it, I think — anandreandromia? — the tendency for things to become their opposites. Marvel was once the struggling underdog company. What has happened?*

BILL: Yeah, and that's the interesting thing, too, is that things change very, very rapidly and in ways that nobody figured. That's why I dispute people who take a very harsh view of life, that the way to be realistic about things is to say that in 20 years this is what's going to happen, you know, and just follow this thing out to most extreme possibility. There's all of these little ambiguities that life is always giving you. The irony that when Marvel was just starting out... They first said that they couldn't figure out at all why Marvel was succeeding, and then they said that Marvel was succeeding because they had bad artwork and they told all of their artists to draw badly. *(Laughter.)* They had no notion of what was appealing about Marvel to people. And now the people at Marvel are saying that people get gired and they leave Marvel and they're hasbeens and then they go over to work at DC; and that's just, you know, putting your head in the sand. I think that that happens in a lot of different things. In my city **Henry Ford II** had a little personality conflict with **Lee Iacocca** and fired him and they said, "Gee, where can **Lee Iacocca** go? There's no place for him." Gosh, you know he *found* a place. It sure was amazing. Things turn around. It's never a good idea to be real sure about everything that you're saying or thinking because life has a nasty little way of laughing at you.

SCOTT: *And yet I get the sense that you're a person who suspends judgments a lot; who waits for all of the information to come in.*

BILL: Well, I try to. For example, I can remember back in '74 all the really wise money... my whole life I heard that things are going to be just like they always were. We got the best country in the world. We got all the resources we could ever want. We got resources we ain't used yet. In six years we're gonna have atomic power coming out of our ears. That turned out almost to be true. *(Laughter.)* Everything's going to be perfect.

Well, that didn't happen. Gas got up to around $1.50 a gallon, and when people saw that it wasn't going to go away they started buying smaller cars and they started *finally* installing some reasonable amount of efficient stuff; and eventually, as happens with everybody, the Arabs got mad at each other. Now gas is back down, and now it's going to go up a little bit more, and now they're going to be saying that we're gonna go up to $4 a gallon again. You know, it just isn't going to happen.

Now, there is a certain entropy going — the universe *is* gradually losing power and the sun *is* going to go out in a couple of billion years, and in about 300 or 400 years we're not going to have any fossil fuel left — it's a good idea to plan ahead here. But despair is not a good motivating factor, and that is what we are getting. I read an article in TV GUIDE — and I was agreeing with it which amazed me — that

THE ARTIST MACHINE (Bill Loebs as Inker & Story Editor). Signed: Wm. Francis Loebs (1981).

"I'm afraid of places with no people."

HUF HUF GET AWAY AND HAK HUFF STAY AWAY! HUFF
HE'S SCOOTED.
THERE YOU ARE, YOU LITTLE RAGTAGS! THEY'VE BEEN WILD AS WOLVES ALL DAY!
AGATHA!
AGATHA?
MM
WELL, CAN'T REALLY BLAME 'EM. IT'S SO NICE TODAY. FATHER SAYS IF THE SIGNS HOLD, WE'LL HAVE AN EARLY SPRING. DO YOU THINK SO, GRAN'FATHER?
PERHAPS.

Panels from JOURNEY #21 (Fantagraphics Books).

the big cities are being shown as such frightening places now that kids in small towns, even though they have no future in the town where they were born, are refusing to go there. They are positive that New York is such a dangerous place. It's difficult to express to people, you know, that danger is different for different people and that there's a lot of luck involved.

I went out, as a relative neophyte, I was told that New York was so busy that it'll eat you alive and you're lucky if you're not shot through the head. You're a lucky dog if you can get out of New York alive.

I walked through Times Square, which is a fairly scuzzy place but no scuzzier than a few neighborhoods in Detroit, and I'd been with a friend who was, again, very into the notion that we had to be on our guard every last minute. I said, "I'm going out for a walk." He said, "It's 3.00 in the morning, Bill! You're going for a walk?" I said, "I thought I'd walk through Times Square." He says, "Bill, you're dead! They're going to kill you in Times Square!" Well, no. There's a lot of lights and there's a lot of people moving around New York all of the time, and a lot of them are fairly scuzzy types but not many of them are mass murderers, and a fairly scuzzy guy who wants to do a dope deal with you is just as good to scare away a mass murderer as a bishop is. I had very little fear in New York. I'm much more afraid of places where there are *no* people around. Then it's only you and whoever you can't see.

SCOTT: *You've had such a broad range of all kinds of experience, I get the impression that for you goals aren't as important as the journey itself, to take an obvious analogy, and that may be the one theme that binds just about everything you've done.*

BILL: Yeah. There's a wonderful quote from **Robert Howard** where he says Conan had dreamt of being king but he had not dreamt far enough. A lot of us dream about getting our first book published, but once you've done that you have to say, "Well, now what exactly do I want to do?" You have to see things as a process rather than as the goal. It's real easy to run out of goals. "Gee, I've met **Will Eisner.** I've had a book published. It's time to do something else. Let's smuggle cocaine." (*Laughter.*) It's very difficult to try to see life as something to be conquered. You end up chewing yourself up then.

BACK ISSUES

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"Here in France you have French comics and

THE ALBUM SHOPS

The Album shops are a must stop for all serious comics enthusiasts when visiting Paris. At Jean Marc Lofficier's recommendation we stopped to see Yves Rasquain, only to discover he was in the USA! Ahh, the shrinking globe. Our disappointment was soon alleviated by the remaining Rasquains and Bruno Terrier. The Rasquains, a closely knit family, are all involved in the stores. Their outlook on life is full of wit and humor, and our visit to Paris became a laugh a minute. Madame Rasquain's generosity knew no bounds, she refused even to allow us to pay for any selections from the store; we were wined, dined and thoroughly amused, French style, in a most delightful fashion that made visiting Paris the enchanting experience universally imagined. Dinner was followed by just one more bottle of champagne, and another . . . and took its toll on us the morning after.

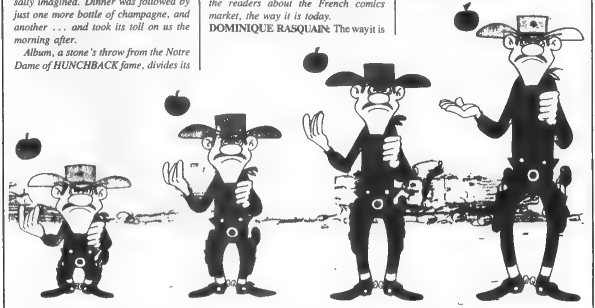
Album, a stone's throw from the Notre Dame of HUNCHBACK fame, divides its retail area into two separate stores; all French material in one store, while next door are solely imports, mainly American, managed by the extremely knowledgeable Bruno. The wonderfully professional window displays bespeak devotion to the comics field. The decorated seasonal windows reveal care and pride in the product displayed. Yves' sister, Dominique, with her tinted hair of many colors, and all the Rasquain family, made us realize why Album is so successful. Large hounds lumbered around looking most unaggressive, but we were lead to believe they keep the shoplifters wary . . .

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *I want to start by asking you to explain a little to the readers about the French comics market, the way it is today.*

DOMINIQUE RASQUAIN: The way it is today we have got three or four big publishers in the French market — Dargaud; Glenat; Humanoides Associes, they have been bought by Hachette; Dupuis, they have been bought by Hachette; Casterman, they are by themselves — and that's it I think. Those are big. Those publishers have some distributors working for them, and the distribution in France is mainly done by the publishers themselves, or by a lone distributor.

DAK: *So there's not one or two national distributors who handle everybody? Each publisher has his own distributor?*

DOMINIQUE: No. We have national distributors for all kind of press, magazines, and it's called NMPP — Neuvelle Messageri dela Press Parisienne.



Lucky Luke by Morris.

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French bookstores owned by French publishers."

The crew & glue that holds The Album Shops together (clockwise: Dominique, Jean-Jacques, Madame Rasquain and Yves).

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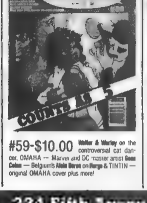

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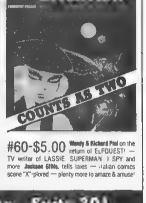

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"We came from Belgium together and we run the stores."

They go to *all* stores selling newspapers every day, to kiosk newsstands, to the station, and so on. But for bookstores the publisher sells the books directly by his own distributor, and that's another type of distribution.

DAK: *And comics here in France, the albums, are not sold on newsstands, just in bookstores?*

DOMINIQUE: Just in bookstores, but some *big* newsstands have comics — the big ones like LUCKY LUKE, ASTERIX, stuff like that, because those are really big sales and people want to see them in stations or in kiosks or so on. *(Customer's question answered.)* But they are sold at the same price as in the bookstore, they don't make a cheap edition of those books.

DAK: *So there's not a softcover edition, there's hardcover just like you find at the bookstore?*

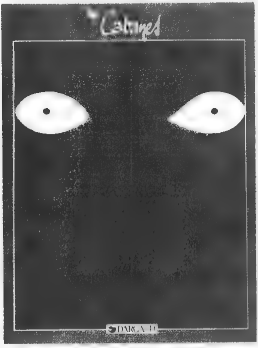
DOMINIQUE: Hardcover, yeah.

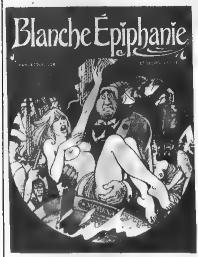
DAK: *And the magazines, the comic books, say the Marvel reprints, do not go into the comic-book stores at all, they go just on the newsstands?*

DOMINIQUE: Yeah, just in the newsstands.

DAK: *That's very different from the U.S. where all of these things are all in the comic-book stores. You have a big division.*

DOMINIQUE: Okay, except for the na-





The graphic album format dominates in France. Above are some of the merchandise available at Album — published by Dargaud — one of France's largest publishers.
(Copyrights held by appropriate creators)

"I like books and I am

WAIT A MINUTE! THIS ONE IS DAY TWELVE TO FIFTEEN! I DON'T WANT TO READ "MUD WRESTLING LOVE" AGAIN!
I'M HUNGRY! TAKE ME TO OKI-NUTS!
SHADDAP, WILL YA? I'M TRYING TO READ!
HOPEY? WHERE IS THAT DAMN TURN OFF? HOPEY! WILL YOU PLEASE TELL ME WHERE... HOPEY?
IS THAT A COP? I THINK WE SHOULD STASH THE BEERS! WAIT! IS THAT A COP!
GIMME A BEER!
HEY, HOPEY! PASS ME DAY EIGHTEEN TO NINETEEN! I WANNA READ ABOUT THE CONTEST PENNY WON! AND PASS ME A BEER, TOO!
I WANT TO READ WHAT THAT CRAZY GUY IS DOING TO THEM NOW! DUCH! FUCKIN' HOPEY! WHY WON'T YOU LET ONE OF US SIT UP FRONT WITH YOU?
JUST BE GLAD YOU HAVE A RIDE HOME! HEY, IZZY! SINCE WHEN HAS YOUR PEESASNIT CAR LIGHTER WORKED?
ARE THOSE COP HEADLIGHTS BEHIND US? THEY LOOK SQUARE!
LET'S GO GET SOMETHING TO EAT! REWIND THE TAPE! IZZY, REWIND THE...
OH, MAN...GOING OUT OF MY MIND... GOTTA CALM DOWN... RELAX... OK... TALK ABOUT... MAGGIE'S JOB... OK... WHERE THE HELL IS THAT TURN OFF... CAN'T SEE... OK... WAIT... GOTTA PEE NOW... GREAT...

From LOVE & ROCKETS #2 (by Jaime Hernandez) . . .

tional distributor, NMPP, that's owned by a big press group — part of it is Hachette.

DAK: *You were also saying, when we were admiring the store window, and the fact that there was a shop — was it Dupuis that has the shop?*

DOMINIQUE: Yeah, Dupuis. It was his own store. Dupuis is a Belgian publisher and he *had* his own store in France, but when Dupuis was bought by Hachette, Hachette bought the store, so now it's run by a man from Hachette.

DAK: *Is it a chain of stores?*

DOMINIQUE: Just one. They just open one in 25 years. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *We noticed in their window they're knocking 50% off the cover price.*

DOMINIQUE: Yeah, the law accepts that when it's older than two years. You can reduce the price 20% but then they made it 50% because they can't sell them anymore. So they try to *give* it to the people!

DAK: *But it's actually against the law to discount?*

DOMINIQUE: The Socialists seven years ago made a law about books in France that the publisher has to set the price that the retailer's offer to people, and then the retailer can make 5% discount off that price. That law was really *great* for all those making books and for all people buying books and for all people publishing books. Before, to the supermarket and so on a publisher *had* to give something like 60% discount and then he *lost* money. To not lose money he would put the price higher so they could discount in the supermarket and give 35% discount. So for example, if the book would have been sold at 50 francs he would put it at 70 francs, so 70 francs minus 60% for supermarket and 35% for us, it would be better for them than not giving 60% to supermarkets. They want to show their books in big supermarket because there are a lot of people there. But *then* the price of the books raised up 50% more every year, you see. But now in three or four years prices of the books have only raised maybe 15%, because this law makes the books stay at a good price.

But they didn't go far enough because they should have to make everybody the same discount, supermarket, bookstore, newsstand and so on, at 40%, not 60% for some and 30% for the others. If super-

proud to sell comics."

ET ØJEBLIK! DET HER ER DAG TOLV TIL FJORTEN! JEG ØDER IKKE LÆSE OM MULDERBADS-ELSKOV!! IGEN!
JER ER SULTEN! HEN TIL BURGER KING!
KNYT! JEG PRØVER PÅ AT LÆSE!
HOPEY? HVOR ER DEN FORBANDEDE AFKØRSEL! SIG MIG HVOR JEG SKAL DREJE!
GI' MIG EN BAJER!
ER DET DER EN STRØMER? JEG TROR VI SKAL GEMME ØL-LERNE!
STIK MIG DAG ÆTTEN TIL NITTEN! JEG VIL LÆSE OM KONKURRENCEN PENNY VANDT! STIK MIG EN BAJER, OK?
JEG VIL LÆSE OM HVAD DEN STØDER GØR VED DEM NU! SATANS! HVORFOR MÅ EN AF OS IKKE SIDDE OMME VED DIS?
VÆR GLAD FOR AT DU BLIVER KØRT! IZZY! SIDEN HVOR-NÅDE HAR DIN LORTEBILLIGHTER VIRKET?
ER DET DER STRØMERLYGTER BAGVED? DE SER KANTEDE UD!
LAD OS NU FÅ NOGET AT ÆDE! SØDL BRÆNDT TIL-BAGE! IZZY...
WOW, MAND.. VED AT SKRIDE UD.. SE AT KOMME NED.. SLAP AF.. OK.. HVOR HELVEDE ER DEN AFKØRSEL... KAN IKKE SE.. VENT.. SKAL PISSE... FEDT...

The same panels from one of a half dozen foreign reprints.

markets would sell 1,000 books they would make 1,000 times 40%. In my bookstore I would sell 100 books and would make 100 times 40%. A newsstand, a kiosk, would sell 10 and he would make 10 times 40%. But the cost of the kiosk business is not so expensive. I have to pay the rent here, they have to pay the rent in the supermarket. Not many people work for us because we don't have a big big store, but in the supermarket they have a lot of people to pay. So it would be better if the law would go further. But right now it's not the Socialists anymore that have power, so the law stays as it is.

DAK: *But yet people do openly discount beyond the law, they have the signs in the windows. Do they just take a chance?*

DOMINIQUE: They can go to court by doing that. Some have gone to court, like FNAC. They have gone to court because they have made 25%, 30%, 35% off discount to the customer, and in France they lost at the court. But there is a European court in Luxemburg at the top, and they decided they were right because some books come from Belgium and that's European Economic Community, it's EEC. You can put a price on the book coming out of France, but then when it's arriving from out of France nobody knows the price, you can make your own price. You see? The law that the Socialist government made was against the law of EEC, so outside of France you can ...

DAK: *Do as you wish with it.*

DOMINIQUE: Yes. You have to do as you want. So some publishers like Casterman, they're from Belgium, their books *you* can put the price on, do your *own* price — if you want to. But we follow the law because we think it's a good one, so books are not too expensive.

DAK: *And I guess the Dupuis store depends on your goodwill not to call up and say, "Hey, they're selling at 50% off."*

DOMINIQUE: No, we don't do that.

DAK: *They must trust you.*

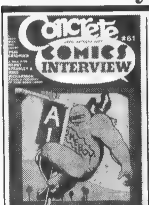
DOMINIQUE: Yeah. We are so close so we try to be friendly together.

DAK: *Well, you have how many stores here?*

DOMINIQUE: We have three stores

DAK: *The main store, where we're doing this interview, is really two stores side by side — one sells French material and*

Order any 2 for $5 — or any 5 for $10.



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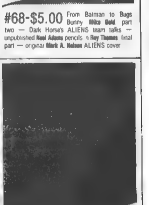

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"We came from Belgium together and we run the stores."

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the other sells English material.

DOMINIQUE: English/American comics.

DAK: *And then you have other stores.*

DOMINIQUE: We have a third one in Rue Monsieur Le Prince It's not far from here, it's still in a good area of Paris. In the fifth area and the sixth area we have many many many bookstores because that's where the university is, La Sorbonne — it's the biggest one in Paris, I think — so all the students go around this area to find their books. So a lot of bookstores are opening in those two areas. And in the center of Paris, very close to Notre Dame and to the river, it's the Latin Quarter.

DAK: *The two stores here are side by side so it looks like one big store. Do you run them as separate stores?*

DOMINIQUE: Yes, it's two *different* owners, we pay two different rents; one is at number 6 and one is at number 8 of Rue Dante —

DAK: *Like the author Dante, that's for our transcriber.*

DOMINIQUE: Yeah, it's hell. *(Laughter.)* Okay, the first store that we opened was the number 6, we opened in June 1980. Then one year after we opened the second store at Rue Monsieur Le Prince. At that time in the first and the second store we were selling *old* French comic books and *new* French comic books.

JULIA MATHER: *Were a lot of the old ones what you had personally collected as a family?*

DOMINIQUE: Yes.

JULIA: *And you decided to sell them?*

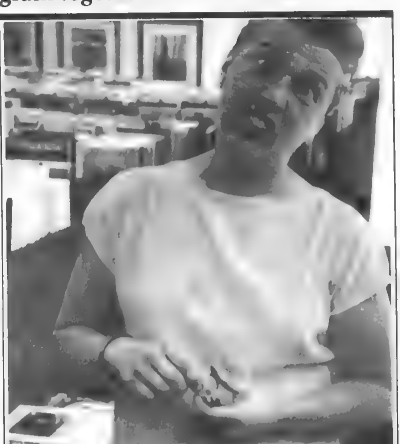
DOMINIQUE: Right. And then when we sold our collection we went to Belgium again to buy some more, you know, that other people had collected.

DAK: *You're from Belgium originally.*

DOMINIQUE: Yes.

DAK: *And the whole family runs the stores?*

DOMINIQUE: Yes. We came from Belgium together and we run the stores. Okay, we didn't come together, first my brother Yves and me, and then when my father died my mother came, six months later. Then when we opened the second stores my two other brothers came to run the second store. Then the third store we opened three years ago. It was a bookstore and the guy was selling American comics, science-fiction novels, movie magazines, posters, and French comics, and when he started to go bankrupt we bought the store and all of the debts — well, that was the price to get it. *(Laughter.)* The danger at that time, one publisher wanted to buy the store, but if a publisher bought the store we would have a hard time, I think, to be close together



Funny French faces by Dominique.

DAK: *Is it easy to work together as a family?*

DOMINIQUE: Yeah, sure, it's *more* easy with the family than with somebody else because, you know, in the family we can say, "*Shit!*" or we can give a big kiss because we are happy. With somebody else you have to be always the same humor and so on. I don't know what Bruno thinks of that. *(Laughter.)* But, you know, we have to put the point, every day we have to do this, this and this, and we have to make it, and I think with Bruno we do a good job. He's an adult. He's not a child trying to steal money or to just pass his time here to get money at the end of the month and every day it is the same stuff.

DAK: *It sounds like you've had experience with people who are like that.*

DOMINIQUE: Hush. *(Laughter.)* It was a hard time, you know To find good people to work with you. Sometimes it is really discouraging.

DAK: *How long have you been managing the American or the English part?*

BRUNO TERRIER: Three years.

DAK: *So you have a pretty good feel for it*

BRUNO: Yeah.

DAK: *Have you ever made a really big mistake like ordering a million copies of*

"Comic-book stores sometimes really

a New Universe #1 or anything?
BRUNO: No
DAK: *That's good.*
BRUNO: Sometimes we make mistakes because we have to order three months before, so when it's a new series we don't really know.
JULIA: *But you read all of the reviews from COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE and whatever?*
BRUNO: We receive the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE very late, say one month after. We get the comics before we get the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE. The comics come out in New York on Thursday and we get the comics here on Saturday or Monday.
DAK: *That's amazing, to get the comics that fast all the way in Paris. Do you put them on sale the same day?*
BRUNO: Naturally.
DAK: *How do you get the books so quickly from the States?*
BRUNO: Oh, it's —
DOMINIQUE: We don't want to *explain* it! *(Laughter.)*
DAK: *Trade secret?*
DOMINIQUE: Yeah, that's a business secret. We looked around for a long time before we found the company who did it so fast, making it so fast.
DAK: *Do you have much competition in Paris? Are there other comic-book shops, or many of them?*
DOMINIQUE: There is another one called Deesse.
DAK: *Yeah, they owe us money.* (Laughter.) *They advertised in COMICS INTERVIEW then they "forgot" to send the check — we should go over there and see them.*
DOMINIQUE: Yeah, it's really close to here.
DAK: *Let's get those two big guys —*
DOMINIQUE: You don't need big guys to go over there, they're really little. *(Laughter.)* No, I don't want to be mean.
DAK: *But they're your only Independent competition and any other stores are owned by the publishers?*
DOMINIQUE: Here in France you have French comics and French bookstores owned by French publishers, like Glenat and the one owned by Dupuis. You have a lot of bookstores owned by Hachette. Some are owned by big publishers, you know. They have their own store, their own distributor.
DAK: *In selling the French material how are you able to compete with a large publisher that also has distribution and bookstores?*
DOMINIQUE: With family. We don't want a lot of money just for us, we want a good business, and I think in the comics market we have a good business. The publishers like us, when we have to pay then we pay what we have to pay. So the relationship between them and Album is pretty good. We like to work with them and I think they like to work with us, because we never fight each other. We try to *work* with them and they try to *work* with us, so the relationship is pretty good. And I think in the comics market we have the best discount that anybody ever had. We have something around 40% discount for a comic-book store.
DAK: *From them to you?*
DOMINIQUE: Yes.
JULIA: *Which is the most profitable, the French store or the one that sells the imports?*
DOMINIQUE: The French comic-book store still, because, you know, here people don't speak English, it's not their language. They try to speak English and they try to read it, but it's hard, it's really an effort. So we don't sell as much in the American comic-book store as we sell in the French comic-book store.
DAK: *And I would imagine you have a greater overhead with shipping all of the books from the States.*

THE STRANGEST SUPER-HEROES OF ALL!
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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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MARVEL COMICS GROUP 12¢
IN THE SENSATIONAL FANTASTIC FOUR STYLE!
DON'T MISS THIS FABULOUS FIRST ISSUE!
X-MEN VERSUS MAGNETO EARTH'S MOST POWERFUL SUPER-VILLAIN!

The cover of X-MEN #1 (Kirby & Ayers) — only one of the many comics for sale at The Album Shops (on display).

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look like private clubs — I hate that."

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DOMINIQUE: What does "overhead" mean?

DAK: *Extra cost*

DOMINIQUE: Sure. When we buy 1,000 French francs worth of comics, you can be sure we have to spend 1,000 French francs just for them to fly, for the shipping. Shipping is really expensive by plane, to receive them really fast.

DAK: *And yet you have enough readers of comic books in English willing to pay that price — you're charging about 50% higher than the cover price...*

BRUNO: Well, for the $.75 comic book we charge 6 francs which is about $1.15.

DOMINIQUE: It's not enough to pay for the new comics, but when they come to the store to buy the new comic they also buy an old comic. Old comics I can get cheaper because they come by boat, which is really cheap. So when they buy an old comic I make more profit than on a new comic.

DAK: *And you actually buy old comics for sale? Let's say that you could sell five new comics, you don't order ten and sell five and save five for back issues?*

DOMINIQUE: No, we don't do that — we don't have *enough* new comics. *(Laughter.)* We nearly have enough for one month, but then the rest come by boat.

DAK: *Ah, I see, you just get enough by air to last for the customers who have to have it right away.*

DOMINIQUE: Right away, just during that month, and then it comes later by boat so it's less expensive. But it's hard to count what do I need for just one month.

JULIA: *You have to do double orders on everything, for now and then back-up stock?*

DOMINIQUE: Right. It's hard to count how many do I need for one month when they make MILLENIUM or "Fall of the Mutants" or a new series like BLOOD or like BLACKHAWK. It's hard to know how many do I have to ask for, 200, 300, 400? I don't know how many I need for one month because it's a new series.

DOC SAVAGE . . . a sell-out at The Album Shop! Of course, not that many were ordered.

BELOW: 6-8 RUE DANTE, BY NIGHT

DAK: *Because you're guessing. Bruno does that, right?*

BRUNO: Yeah, that's right, it's another day of work. Each week we get a paper and we count everything. With X-MEN for example, we receive 400, after one week we sell 100, after two weeks we sell 200.

DAK: *So you keep sort of a flowchart.*

BRUNO: Yeah.

DAK: *Is that what you sell of X-MEN, 400?*

BRUNO: Yeah, about. Three years ago we begin with 40 X-MEN and now we have got 400 X-MEN.

DAK: *That has built up. How do you decide on a new title like DC's BLACKHAWK by Howard Chaykin when you've never carried it before? How do you figure out what to order?*

BRUNO: I think it's like in the States, Chaykin is popular and it's a prestige format and it's a mini-series, so I ordered quite a lot. It depends. For example on DOC SAVAGE I ordered not that much and it sold out. *(Photography break.)*

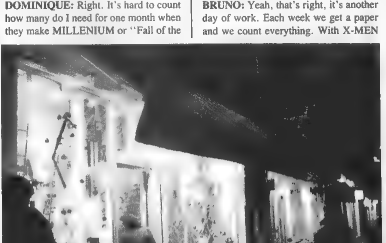
JULIA: *I wanted to talk about the window display outside.*

DOMINIQUE: One of my loves is window display.

JULIA: *We're really impressed with the window displays.*

DOMINIQUE: Thank you.

JULIA: *It's refreshing to see that. I'm sure all of the publishers and distributors*



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THAT'S NO WAY TO THINK. GROW UP. IT'S THE EIGHTIES. YOU DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO.
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GIRL WILL SAY LOTS WHEN SHE'S HUNGRY. THINGS I HEAR...
WANT A SHOT? NO, DIDN'T THINK SO -- NOT A SHOT OF BOOZE, ANYWAY...

The DAREDEVIL stories that never made it to France: Miller & Mazzuchelli's splash (panels) from issue 227.

and creators especially would love to see their products displayed that way in America, since in a lot of places they don't, because the retailers don't treat the comics field as a serious retail area that requires all of that aesthetic backup. They give the comic-book shop a sort of a sleazy look and a lot of people don't want to go into them, and it really affects their market.

DOMINIQUE: Well, I like books and I am proud to sell comics. I don't know why they would give them a sleazy look. It's not sleazy, it's a *book* — books are important for our culture. Books are something that people keep and a store has to be clean, it has to be well done. Everything has to be well done even if it's comics. Comics is not worse than art books or science fiction, you know. It's a book like all of the others. So I want to make an effort to have everything in order, you know. Everything has a good aspect, a good look. So for Christmas I make window for Christmas, for Easter I make window for Easter. I want people being happy in my store, to find what they like. So for Christmas if they want to buy books, it's okay, great.

JULIA: *So you put them out in your window to show them as a present.*

DOMINIQUE: Right! Comics are good enough to be a present, that's for sure, and I'm really proud of it!

DAK: *How do you decide what to put in the window, what books you are going to spotlight and so on?*

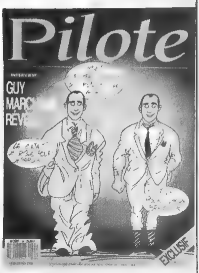
DOMINIQUE: Well, I decide with Bruno. For example we have a movie magazine in books, so for example the book INDUSTRIAL LIGHT AND MAGIC, we put it in the window. We have some new graphic novels, so we put them in the window. We have some rare comics, like X-MEN –1, –2 and –3 in really good mint, so we put them in the window. We have already sold it at the beginning of December, so they will not see Christmas in the window, but it's okay for a present. And we have some kind of stuff like that. But once a month we change the window, you see. What's new we put them in the window. We want people seeing new stuff, you know, when it comes out. So you have to change the window.

JULIA: *Do you find that the sunlight*

© & TM 1989 Industrial Light & Magic (Lucas Film)

Logo from George Lucas's INDUSTRIAL LIGHT AND MAGIC (The Book).

"The comics market in France is bad, not



PILOTE — now combined as PILOTE & CHARLIE (below).

damages any of these products, is there any fading?

DOMINIQUE: No, because on the sidewalk we have something that you can roll down for the sun so there is no light coming in to create damage, so to just leave them in the window for a month is okay. Maybe after that you have to put that in the trash can but it's okay, it doesn't cost that much. I'm *stud* if I have to put it in the trash can because, you know, it's a book, but I think it's important to show to people even if they don't enter the bookstore, to show *outside* what's happening there. I think it's important if people on the sidewalk can see *in* the store what's happening, what we show, what we do, what we sell. It's not a private club, you know. Comic-book stores sometimes really look like private clubs and I *hate* that. We are in a store selling books.

JULIA: *To the general public, to everybody.*

DOMINIQUE: To everybody, and everybody who wants to enter is really welcome.

DAK: *This morning we were at Dargaud and we were told there that maybe eight or ten years ago was when the perception of comics in France as being for adults started to really come about. When you started the store were comics in France thought of more as for children than they are today?*

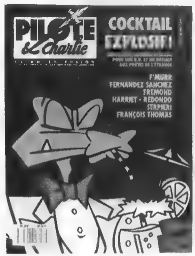
DOMINIQUE: Yeah, they were more for children. The products, the books, were more for children. From eight or ten years we have seen some new magazines, like (A SUIVRE), printing stuff just for adults. Well, it was not more erotic, it was not more that way, it was just the stories were more serious. They were more talking about life while for children it was more about dream. For adults it was more realistic. Dargaud at that time had PILOTE, it was their magazine, and ten years ago they create or bought CHARLIE MENSUEL — *mensuel* means monthly — that was for adults. Right now they have mixed both together.

DAK: *They combined?*

DOMINIQUE: Yeah.

DAK: *Why do you think the market grew more mature here? Why do you think that change happened?*

DOMINIQUE: Because people 20 years ago, 30 years ago, read comics. Those



(A SUIVRE) translated means (TO BE CONTINUED)

in my level — it's bad for the publishers."

© 1989 DC Comics, Inc.

people are adults now and they're happy with the comics for children because they started to read comics with stuff for kids. But right now they are adults so they need other stories. That's why I think they started to publish stuff for adults. But I think also that comics have touched more people than 20 years ago. If you had at that time 100 people reading comics, maybe now 1,000 read comics. So those 1,000 are adults, not kids who don't have money enough to buy European comics. What kids buy is what you find at the kiosk and newsstands, it's STRANGE, and that's translations of American comics, and it costs something like 10 francs, $1.50, to get three or four American comics.

DAK: *Is that Editions Lug?*

DOMINIQUE: Yeah, that's Lug.

DAK: *So the younger kids buy the comic books from the newsstand.*

BRUNO: Yeah. They begin to buy them in French and then when they come to the store a lot of people begin to buy the American Editions.

DOMINIQUE: The big problem with Lug is that they have censorship. The publisher censors himself, you know. He doesn't translate *all* American comics, he just translates some pages of it. You know, he *forgets* some drawings. For example in STRANGE they stopped two months ago translating DAREDEVIL because it's reached the part by **Miller** and **Mazzuchelli,** so nobody in France will know that part of the story of Daredevil because Lug didn't want to print it.

DAK: *It was a little too much for their younger readers?*

DOMINIQUE: I think that's what they think.

JULIA: *One of the things we found out yesterday by chance was that Editions Lug is being purchased by the Scandinavian group that publishes all of Marvel's things in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and I think they go into Holland and Finland, as well.*

DOMINIQUE: We didn't know that.

JULIA: *I don't know if that will change what you're saying.*

DOMINIQUE: There is another publisher in France translating comics, American comics, it's Aredit, but they stopped also this month, printing American comics in French. It was only DC, right?

BRUNO: Yes, only DC.

DAK: *They stopped?*

DOMINIQUE: They stopped.

DAK: *Why?*

DOMINIQUE: I don't know why. They started to print WATCHMEN. The first

From WATCHMEN #1 . . . the missing page in France (in part).

I NEVER CLAIMED TO BE ANYBODY SPECIAL, RORSCHACH. I JUST HAVE SOME OVER-ENTHUSIASTIC P.R. MEN.
LISTEN... COULD IT HAVE BEEN A POLITICAL KILLING? MAYBE THE SOVIETS...
DREIBERG SAID SAME THING. DON'T BELIEVE IT.
AMERICA HAS DR. MANHATTAN. REDS HAVE BEEN RUNNING SCARED SINCE '65. THEY'D NEVER DARE ANTAGONIZE US.
I THINK WE'VE GOT A MASK-KILLER.
NOT NECESSARILY
THE COMEDIAN HAD PLENTY OF OTHER POLITICAL ENEMIES TO CHOOSE FROM, EVEN DISCOUNTING THE RUSSIANS...
THE MAN WAS PRACTICALLY A NAZI.
HE STOOD UP FOR HIS COUNTRY, VEIDT. HE NEVER LET ANYBODY RETIRE HIM.
NEVER CASHED IN ON HIS REPUTATION.
NEVER SET UP A COMPANY SELLING POSTERS AND DIET BOOKS AND TOY SOLDIERS BASED ON HIMSELF.
NEVER BECAME A PROSTITUTE.
IF THAT MAKES HIM A NAZI, YOU MIGHT AS WELL CALL ME A NAZI TOO.
HM.

"Follow the same road as the French comics, it has to be good."

two issues of WATCHMEN and the first of QUESTION together in one book, just cost $2.00, that was good for French people. And they don't have any censorship in Aredit.

BRUNO: In just one page.

DAK: *Which page?*

BRUNO: It's page 17 of WATCHMEN #1.

DAK: *Was that just an accident or did they think —*

BRUNO: I don't know, maybe it's an accident. They ought to . . .

DOMINIQUE: To count the pages of their publication. Maybe they had to leave one page out just for the count, for the printing format.

DAK: *How long had they been publishing DC?*

BRUNO: For about 20 years.

DAK: *And they just this month stopped? Are they publishing other material?*

BRUNO: No.

DAK: *They just ceased publication. Do you think they are a casualty of the comic-book crash?*

DOMINIQUE: I think they would like to sell their stock, but to sell their stock they have to print new stuff. I don't know, I really don't know why. I got that information three or four days ago, so I don't know why, yet.

DAK: *With the French market having experienced the crash maybe ahead of us, maybe at the same time — I'm not really sure — did that lessening of the market affect the sales of the American comics? Did the sales of the imported comics go down when the sales of the French comics went down?*

BRUNO: No.

DOMINIQUE: But it's hard to compare because we bought that stock three years ago. When we bought the third store we bought the American comics, you know, that he was selling, so we tried at that time to make a good business with American comics. We really tried to get them fast, we tried to show them. We were selling American comics here in that room downstairs. *(Customer break.)*

DAK: *What happened to the store when the French comics market started to contract? How did that affect your retail sales?*

DOMINIQUE: I don't understand the question.

DAK: *Did you lose revenue from the store when French publishers started to cut back and sell less?*

DOMINIQUE: No because at the same time some new publishers, *little* publishers, started to make limited editions of . . . lithography prints, I don't know what the word is in English.

DAK: *Lithographs?*

DOMINIQUE: Lithographs, yeah. They cost a lot, 300, 400 French francs for one. And at the same time they started to make limited editions of books, so collectors started to buy those things, and it was really expensive also. They make, for ex-

THE THIRD INCAL by Jodorowsky & Moebius.

© 1989 Jodorowsky & Moebius

"We hit them and they never come back." *(Laughter.)*

ample, 1,000 copies of one book and then they sell it at 500, 600, 1,000 French francs. So if I don't sell *many* books, if I sell less books, I make more profits on other stuff. They have made a target of Tintin and it cost a lot, something like 1,500 French francs — a big target!

DAK: *Which is $300 U.S.?*

DOMINIQUE: Yes, right. *(French exchange.)* You know my mother took some pictures — she did not put a roll of film in the camera! *(Laughter.)* She has to start all over! *(Laughter.)* She is a real dreamer *(Photography break.)*

DAK: *We have similar catastrophes. We had the tape recorder in a bag and the button got pushed on, so by the time we got ready to interview one publisher the machine was dead.*

JULIA: *They were excited to be interviewed and we were leaving Italy that day, and then we pulled out the tape recorder — phfft!*

DAK: *So the change in the market didn't really hurt the store?*

DOMINIQUE: No, but I think the comics market in France is bad, not at *my* level, not in the bookstores — it's bad for the publishers. When everything goes okay they publish good stuff and horrible stuff — because they thought that people would buy even horrible stuff, okay? So French people started to choose because it cost a lot to buy everything. The collector would buy everything, but when the collector started to realize that that's shit, he doesn't buy it anymore. So the publishers started to print horrible stuff, but they couldn't *sell* it. But the good stuff, I still sell it, you know, pretty well. So I still continue to make money. But not the publisher because he has big stock of shit. *(Laughter.)* Sorry for the word.

DAK: *The parallels to the marketplace in the United States are amazing.*

BRUNO: I think it was the same problem.

DAK: *Yeah. It happened last year with black-and-whites and I think this year it's going to happen with albums, graphic novels, in the United States. It's the same type of thing.*

JULIA: *Which would be a shame because it will contract the market on good graphic novels as it contracted the market on good black-and-whites — people sort of went, "Phh, black-and-whites, leave 'em alone." It will be a shame if that happens to albums because some people are getting together some really beautiful albums and lovely collections, similar to what is now your base market. Most French comics are actually in an album format, aren't they?*

DOMINIQUE: Yes, with hardcovers. So the problem is at the publisher not with the retailer. The publishers having a big stock go bankrupt. So the big publishers like Hachette bought the little one like Les Humanoides Associes, the people who were making METAL HURLANT. Okay, those people have printed **Moebius**, that's something really big! You know the story INCAL, the one written by **Jodorowsky** and drawn by **Moebius**? That was a *big* story, five albums, five books, and they made money with that. But they also gave the chance to new artists to be published, but they lost money. So they have been bought by Hachette now for nearly one year. But Hachette wouldn't print those new artists. It's amazing to see now that the big publishers just publish books that they are *sure* they will sell. So you just find now ASTERIX, LUCKY LUKE, and stuff like that. It's easy to sell that, you find them everywhere. But you don't find a lot of *new* artists and that's not too good, because I like new stuff.

Moebius by Moebius (circa 1975).

DAK: *You haven't lost your love for comics?*

DOMINIQUE: Yes, I read them. I have to read them if I have to sell them, I have to know what's in it. So I have to know the stories, I have to know if it's good or not. I don't want to sell *anything* to my customers! I'm really serious — too serious. *(Laughter.)* But I like it that way, I wouldn't do it in another way.

DAK: *Do you recommend things you think are good?*

DOMINIQUE: Yeah, sure, sure. I prefer to recommend things that are good. Saying nothing ... I'm not a cashier, you know. I have a bookstore and I like books,

"The main problem now for me is I have to read about 100

so I like to talk with people and then they talk to me back. I don't like to sell the last X-MEN without saying *nothing*. That's nothing, that's not selling books, you know. I like to discuss it and I like to sell them, really to make people feel happy that they are reading that kind of story. It's important sometimes to read those stories and not the other ones.

DAK: *Do you ever have the artists in for promotions and signings or so on?*

DOMINIQUE: Yeah, we have had **Walt Simonson, Steve Lelaloha, Bill Sienkiewicz** —

BRUNO: Frank Cirocco, Ken Steacy.

DOMINIQUE: They are fun people for us because they are coming from far away.

DAK: *Do they let you know well enough in advance to promote that they will be there?*

DOMINIQUE: At least 10 days, two weeks, before they were coming. We wish to have one day **Frank Miller** and **Dave Gibbons**, you know, but I think it's hard to get them. As for the French artists, it's really easy for us, nearly every Saturday we have a shop appearance.

DAK: *Do you think that helps some of the newer artists who aren't yet very very popular?*

DOMINIQUE: Well . . . it makes *them* feel happy. It's the only way they can talk to people for whom they write stories and for whom they draw stories. But I think when a customer comes into the store to get his album signed by the artist, he already knows him, he's already bought that book. So it doesn't make the artist more well known.

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A big seller in France . . . LONE WOLF (from First Comics).

DAK: *I wondered because, when we did the DRAGON mini-series, we had some stores do promotions and because the artist was there people would buy something to have him sign, and they wouldn't just buy one issue, they would buy the whole set. I thought that might give a boost to the artist.*

BRUNO: Sometimes it's like that.

DOMINIQUE: But it's rare.

DAK: *But do those promotions help* you *sell books?*

DOMINIQUE: Yes, sometimes we sell double. *(Customer break.)*

DAK: *Do you prefer the American comics to the French comics?*

BRUNO: Yeah, I think so.

DAK: *It's not just a job to you?*

BRUNO: No. The main problem now for me is I have to read about 100 comics a month, so I don't have the time to read all of my French comics!

DAK: *Do you order based on the books you like and so on?*

BRUNO: No, not really. A lot of people buy Marvel and DC comics and I like a lot of the independents.

DAK: *Do you read the same 100 comics each month or do you alternate what you read?*

BRUNO: There are some titles I like from a long time ago so I read them, collect

comics a month, so I don't have time to read my French comics."

them.

DAK: *Which ones are your favorites?*

BRUNO: I think my favorite regular series is SWAMP THING.

DAK: *Even after Alan Moore left?*

BRUNO: Yeah, because I like the character and I like that type of series. I'm not very fond of superheroes, I think they're always the same. I read them because a lot of people ask me questions.

DAK: *So you keep up?*

BRUNO: Yeah.

DAK: *What other books do you like that you read regularly?*

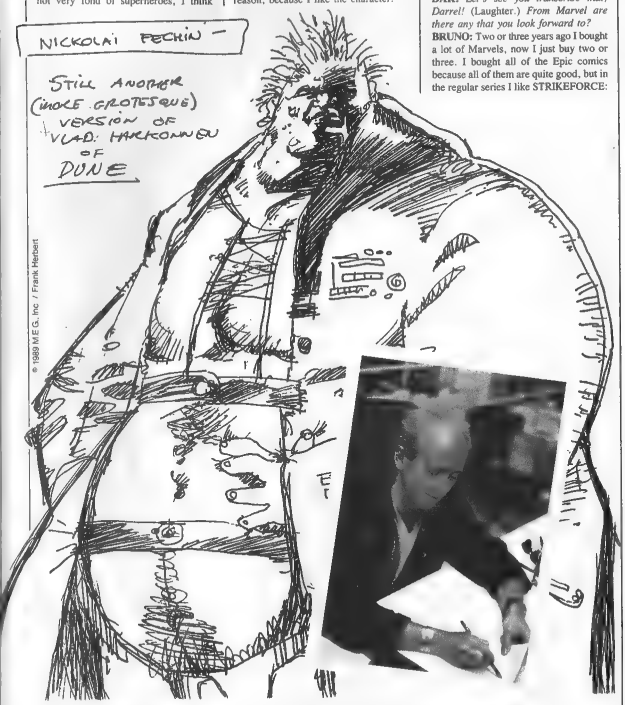
BRUNO: BATMAN, for the same reason, because I like the character.

JULIA: *What did you think of DARK KNIGHT?*

BRUNO: I think it's good! I *prefer* RONIN. For DARK KNIGHT I don't really like the drawing. I like the story very much. WATCHMEN was good, too. *(Boss break, French dialogue.)*

DAK: *Let's see you transcribe that, Darrel!* (Laughter.) *From Marvel are there any that you look forward to?*

BRUNO: Two or three years ago I bought a lot of Marvels, now I just buy two or three. I bought all of the Epic comics because all of them are quite good, but in the regular series I like STRIKEFORCE:



Bill Sienkiewicz signs autographs at The Album Shop. The sketch is from Marvel's DUNE adaptation (by Bill).

"I think The Shadow is a typical character from the

THE SHADOW by Berni Wrightson (ad).

MORITURI, I think the story is quite nice, and I like THE 'NAM, although the drawing is not that good, and that is all.

JULIA: *Do you like LONE WOLF?*

BRUNO: Yeah, I like LONE WOLF from First Comics.

JULIA: *Do you read MAI and so on?*

BRUNO: Yeah. The problem with MAI is the censorship, it's quite terrible.

DAK: *I wonder if people are aware of that.*

BRUNO: They are. In the comic they tell that they have to do that not to have "Mature Audiences" on the cover. But it's not a good idea because for KAMUI they have the "Mature Audiences" and it's not a problem.

DAK: *Ah. I guess they're experimenting with KAMUI and MAI to see if it makes a difference.*

BRUNO: Yeah, maybe. But MAI without the violence and so on, it's not interesting, it has *nothing* to do with the original.

DAK: *In the three years that you've been managing the store has there been a change in the taste for American comics or in what sells?*

BRUNO: Yeah, a lot has changed I think. The main problem for American comics . . . there are two problems. The first one is the format, it's very different from the European comics, the albums, so not many people *like* them.

DAK: *They don't like the pamphlet when they're used to a hardcover book?*

BRUNO: Yeah. The second problem is superheroes. In France not a lot of people like superheroes, they are more used to humor and realistic situations. Superheroes . . .

DAK: *It's an acquired taste.*

BRUNO: Yeah.

DAK: *Who are the people who buy the imported comics? Are they younger kids, are they —*

JULIA: *Students, yuppies?*

BRUNO: A lot of students, yeah.

DAK: *Do you have "yuppies" here in France?*

BRUNO: Yeah, but not for the comic books. We have two different markets in France, younger people who buy Marvel comics only, even if it's not interesting, and the people who like the drawing, the good stuff.

DAK: *There's not as many people, of course, who want to buy comics in a language that's not their native language.*

THE SHADOW by Jim Steranko.

BRUNO: No.

DAK: *And then there's not too much interest in superheroes, and most of the imports are those.*

BRUNO: I feel *that's* the main problem. But, for instance, WATCHMEN is not really a story about superheroes. In the translation of WATCHMEN the cover was different from the American one, it was a drawing of the Comedian, so there is the superhero in his costume and a lot of people don't open the book, think it's for kids.

DAK: *So, Marvel sells best for you in the imports?*

BRUNO: Now it's quite different because DC is better and better, but two years ago Marvel had 90% of the market. Now it's about 40% for Marvel, 40% for DC, the rest for the independents.

DAK: *What would be some of the best selling independents for you?*

Original covers from 1933-34.

THE SHADOW is © 1989 by the Conde Nast Publications, Inc.

'40s but The Shadow from Chaykin is not The Shadow."

BRUNO: The best selling independent is LONE WOLF, and I think it's mainly because of the covers.

JULIA: *Here in Europe people buy comic books not because they are Marvel or because they are DC, they buy them because of the authors, as one would buy an Agatha Christie or a —*

BRUNO: There's two different kinds of people. There are a lot of people who buy only Marvel or only DC, the younger people do that. They used to read them before in French, and when it's stuff like the independents that are not translated, then they don't open them.

JULIA: *If people buy because of the authors or because of the artists, which authors and artists would you say are the most popular here?*

BRUNO: I think **John Byrne** is the most popular, and just after that **Frank Miller.**

DAK: *Is Chaykin in there?*

BRUNO: Chaykin, yeah, the drawing is okay but the kind of story he writes is very quite strange. A lot of time it's . . . anti-communism? A lot of people don't like that.

JULIA: *We noticed today they were marching and they caused us a lot of problems, we had to walk the whole of the Boulevard St. Germaine because the police shut it completely off.*

DAK: *We couldn't read the signs so we didn't know what they were demonstrating for, and they sounded violent — they were yelling and screaming — and we thought it was some kind of protest.*

Chaykin's modern-day SHADOW . . . not The Shadow, says Bruno.

JULIA: *Anti-nuclear or something.*

DAK: *And then we asked what it was, it was a "peace rally."* (Laughter.) *And we said, "Well, it was a lot more peaceful before the rally." But I guess you have a very strong Socialist party in France.*

BRUNO: Yeah.

DAK: *What's interesting is you said people think of the Chaykin stuff as being anti-communist, but when I was talking to him he described himself as a red — he used that word. So it's curious that his work would be perceived that way. That's*

Mike Kaluta sketch of THE SHADOW.

Art © Kaluta

ON FRANK MILLER'S *DARK KNIGHT*: "I prefer *Ronin*."

funny.

BRUNO: The way he writes things are quite difficult for French people. I think THE SHADOW was a very strange way to show people.

DAK: *Yeah. I liked the Shadow from when I was growing up, I used to read the old paperback reprints. So I was very much looking forward to THE SHADOW. But I kind of halfway just figured out what was going on and I guess I didn't have the patience to go back and reread it and decipher what was happening there.*

BRUNO: I think the Shadow is a typical character from the '40s but the Shadow from Chaykin is not really the Shadow.

DAK: *No, it's the 1980s Shadow — the Shadow on speed.* (Laughter.) *But it's interesting to see DC doing that.*

BRUNO: Yeah, it's interesting.

DAK: *Well, in the French comics — because Dominique had to leave — what do you think is happening in the French comics overall? Do you think it's a shrinking market? Do you think that is changing the direction?*

BRUNO: Now we're right in the middle of it so it's difficult. I'm not really impressed with what's happening in the French market. Yves could tell you many things about it.

DAK: *Ah. Well, we'll catch him the next time around, get a fresh viewpoint. It's interesting to talk to someone here who is looking at the American comics and so on from outside. You are outside and away from it, what do you think has been happening with the market and the way it has been evolving and so on? What's your opinion of the American comics market, the whole thing?*

BRUNO: I think if they follow the same road as the French comics ten years ago, it has to be good. The situation in the States for comics now is the same as ten years ago in France, more and more adults are coming to comics and so on. But I think two years ago it was not as good as it is now.

DAK: *The level of quality wasn't as good as it is today?*

BRUNO: Yeah, that's it.

DAK: *Also there's an evolution going on among the creators. The creators used to work only on characters which were owned by the company, and now with the creators able to do their own material, to keep the copyrights, I think on the business level it's becoming also more like the French comics. I don't know if it's going to follow* exactly *in those tracks and all of the little publishers will go bankrupt and there will be, you know —*

BRUNO: I think the problem is there is too many different companies and too many comics each month. It's a problem here in France, too. Because when there are bad comics, people *always* see the bad comics and not the good ones. And if they are disappointed by the comics they have just bought then they should not buy *those* comics, but not treat all comics like the comics they don't like.

DAK: *Do you think that people who look at the American comics, that they look at the creators? Do they look at Frank Miller or Bill Sienkiewicz or —*

BRUNO: Yes!

DAK: *— or do you think they are looking for characters, for continued stories?*

BRUNO: People around probably ten to sixteen years old look at the characters, and after that they look at the artists. It's a very different market.

DAK: *So when they're young the*

Bruno's favorite work from Frank Miller . . . RONIN.

"I enjoy comics. I want people in France to enjoy American comics."

Copyright © 1988 Hugo Pratt.

character attracts them, and as they grow older they get more discriminating?

BRUNO: Right, they know a lot of things.

DAK: *Switching back to the store, what would you say is the most difficult part of managing the store?*

BRUNO: *(Pause.)* Everything. *(Laughter.)* To look, you know, and say one is too brown and everything.

DAK: *Grading the comics?*

BRUNO: Yeah. To watch the people so they aren't stealing. And to order the comics, not making the mistakes. The best part of it is to discuss with people. I think now when I discuss with someone — they always ask me this week what's new and what's good, and when I tell them they always try to read it. That's good.

JULIA: *One thing just occurred to me, when you purchase comics from overseas do you pay them in francs or do you pay them in dollars?*

BRUNO: I purchase in dollars.

JULIA: *You really must be very pleased with what's happened to the dollar!* (Laughter.)

BRUNO: Sure, but I am not involved in the money aspect of the business. First of all I *enjoy* comics and I want people in France to enjoy American comics. The money now is not my problem, it's Yves' and Dominique's problem.

DAK: *Yeah, I was going to ask her how the responsibilities broke down, who in the family does what job.*

BRUNO: They've got a lot of things together, I think it's Yves who does the most because he was the first one here. Concerning ordering comics and buying comics and so on, I do it and he pays me. *(Laughter.)* That's good.

DAK: *You mentioned stealing, is that a problem?*

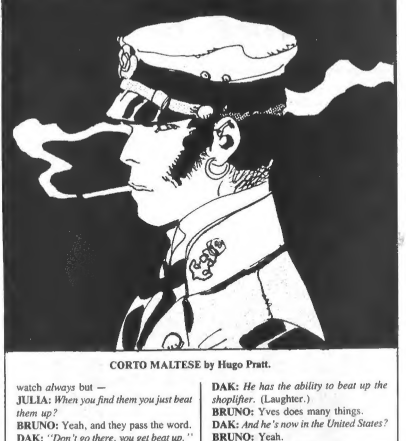
BRUNO: Yeah.

DAK: *I guess it's easier to steal the American comics because they're so flimsy.*

BRUNO: Yeah, that's a big problem.

JULIA: *What do you do when you catch people stealing?*

BRUNO: We hit them and they never come back. *(Laughter.)* The problem was before the shop was Album it was another shop, and the comics were kept downstairs and sometimes there was nobody here, only customers, and many people were used to stealing comic books. And they were the only place to come find comics about six years ago, and so a lot of people would come to steal comics. So we have had a lot of problems. Now it's better, but a lot of organized people came only to steal. I think it's okay now. We have to watch *always* but —



CORTO MALTESE by Hugo Pratt.

JULIA: *When you find them you just beat them up?*

BRUNO: Yeah, and they pass the word.

DAK: *"Don't go there, you get beat up."* (Laughter.) *Well, is there not some law here that if you catch people stealing you're not supposed to do anything?*

BRUNO: We're supposed to call a policeman, but it's nothing — because they cannot charge them, really charge them — so the next day they came back.

DAK: *Oh, I see.*

JULIA: *So you just took the law into your own hands!*

BRUNO: Yeah. I don't do that, I don't do that.

DAK: *You would call somebody?*

BRUNO: Yeah.

DAK: *In America, Bruno is a name they sometimes give big, hefty guys, and people reading this might think that being named Bruno, you would be the one who would —*

BRUNO: Even if I was stronger I wouldn't do it.

DAK: *So you call Yves and he comes in?*

BRUNO: Yeah. Yves always wins. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Do they ever fight back?*

BRUNO: No, never, because Yves is so strong. We don't like to do that but it's the only way.

JULIA: *We're giving Yves a nice profile.* (Laughter.)

DAK: *He has the ability to beat up the shoplifter.* (Laughter.)

BRUNO: Yves does many things.

DAK: *And he's now in the United States?*

BRUNO: Yeah.

DAK: *Presumably doing business over there?*

BRUNO: Yeah, yeah.

DAK: *And here we are over here. Well, we'll catch up with him. What do you think is the outlook for the store? Do you think that they'll stick with the three stores or —*

BRUNO: They want to do something else, every two or three years they want to do something else, but it's always kind of secret because if we tell somebody, they could copy the same idea.

DAK: *You know, the competition here, from talking with you and Dominique, is . . . things seem more competitive in a way. You are concerned that people might do what you intend to do and so on. Maybe I'm just naive about retailing, maybe it's the same way in the States, but we don't hear it said that much in the States. Is there a lot of business competition or copying back and forth here?*

BRUNO: Yeah, quite a lot. For what Yves and Dominique have in mind now for the next step, if I tell somebody — it's a big mistake.

DAK: *But there are things coming, things will be happening?*

BRUNO: Things go up from here!

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

MORE COMPREHENSIVE THAN COMPETITORS

I really enjoy **David Anthony Kraft's** COMICS INTERVIEW — your coverage of people in the world of comics is of the highest caliber; it's far more comprehensive than your competitors. I think coverage of comic-inspired movies is an excellent idea, whether good (BATMAN) or bad (HOWARD THE DUCK). I enjoyed the **Sam Hamm** interview very much, in issue #70.

Pat Jankiewicz
2137 Erin Ave.
Upland, CA 91786

Comprehensiveness has its costs.

Take this issue's interview with Bill Loebs (please!) . . . no, just kidding.

Scott and Bill hit it off so well and had so much to say that they taped a monster — nay, a veritable Godzilla — of interviews, all of which associate editor Darrel Boatz dutifully transcribed, sifted through, and otherwise organized for print.

#74
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW
© 1989 DC Comics, Inc.
COMICS INTERVIEW #74 -- $3.95 (Canada: $5.25)
BATMAN'S LIFE IN HELL?
Starting with the hot Bataan cover, through the interview with movie artist BILL STOUT (on everything from dinosaurs to comics to storyboarding vs movie poster art), all the way to MATT GROENIG on "Life in Hell" -- this issue of INTERVIEW is too hot to handle!

Next, it went to Scott (at his request) for editing — after which I had a go at further editing to tame the beast. All this took time, effort and, yes, money. But our motto around here is — nothing's too good for COMICS INTERVIEW's legions of loyal readers . . . it's what you expect of us, the extra effort.

Alas, even with a magazine the very theme of which is communication, sometimes miscommunication (like King Kong challenging Godzilla) rears its ugly head. The interview next went to Bill Loebs for his final editing — where it sat for nearly nine months (or more). We were dutifully awaiting his changes. He had none, and so was dutifully awaiting publication.

When, at last, the situation came clear, we proceeded to schedule the interview for immediate print — and promptly sent it out for typesetting. But about the time we were proofing the type, along came an edited, updated transcript from Nadine — on a computer disk which was, unfortunately, utterly and thoroughly incompatible with our system and that of our typesetter!

Attempts were made to produce a compatible disk, all to no avail (but a great deal of frustraion). It was around this time that we began referring to it as "the interview from hell."

Finally, Bill's commitments to DC Comics and others made it impossible for him to continue efforts at unravelling the crisis on parallel computers. At this point, were we merely a news magazine solely concerned with current comics, we would have abandoned the entire effort — but many topics touched upon in the interview were thought-provoking and transcend any specific time period, making them worthy of consideration by the readers of COMICS INTERVIEW.

So in the end, after all the time and efforts of a team of experts, we decided sometimes the old-fashioned ways are best, and took a pair of scissors to the irrelevant stuff in a last noble effort to preserve the best parts of the first, original, unedited interview.

We trust, after reading "the interview that wouldn't die," that you'll agree all our effort to present the McCloud/Loebs meeting of minds was worth it!

— DAK

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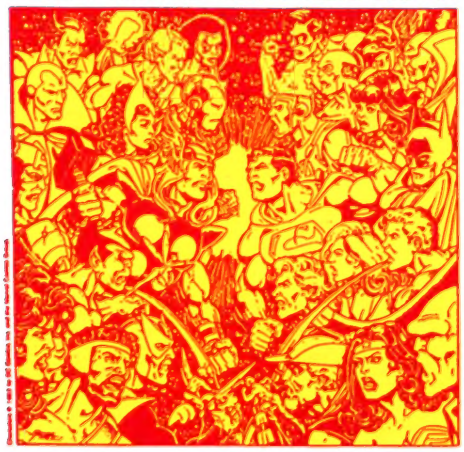

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